

SUPPLEMENTS TO  
VIGILIAE CHRISTIANAE



# Almsgiving as the Essential Virtue

*A Study of the Homilies  
of John Chrysostom*



BECKY WALKER

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## Almsgiving as the Essential Virtue

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*A Study of the Homilies of John Chrysostom*

*By*

Becky Walker



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# Introduction

Pour out your money, not only so that others may be fed, but that you may be delivered from punishment .... Yet virginity, and fasting, and lying on the ground, are more difficult labor than this, but nothing is so strong and powerful to extinguish the fire of our sins as almsgiving .... For virginity, fasting, and lying on the ground only establish the one who practices them, and no other is saved. But almsgiving extends to all (ἡ δὲ ἐλεημοσύνη εἰς πάντας ἐκτείνεται), and embraces the members of Christ, and actions that extend to many are far greater than those which are confined to one.<sup>1</sup>



John Chrysostom is well-known for his promotion of almsgiving. In many ways, there is nothing unique in his witness. He is not unique in his concern for the poor, in his founding of charitable institutions, or in his denouncement of the rich for their greed and rapaciousness.<sup>2</sup> There is also nothing extraordinary in his insistence that almsgiving can forgive and even bring healing from past sins.<sup>3</sup> What makes his discourse on almsgiving stand out, however, is the plethora of wide-ranging benefits he claims this practice bestows as well as the superior rank he assigns to almsgiving among other ascetic practices. He consistently extols almsgiving over virginity, claims that almsgiving is necessary for salvation, and even goes so far to say that almsgiving cleanses *every* sin and counterbalances all sins.<sup>4</sup> These are strong state-

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1 *hom. in Tit.* 6.10 (PG 62, 698).

2 Basil of Caesarea, in particular, was noted for his advocacy for the poor and for his founding of the *Basileiados*, a center of care for the sick just outside of Caesarea. See Basil, *ep.* 176 (Y. Courtonne, ed. *Lettres* II [Paris: *Les Belles Lettres*, 1961], 113). See also, Richard Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice 313–450* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 228–231.

3 For example, see Cyprian of Carthage, *Eleem.* 2 (CCL 3a, 55–56); and Ambrose of Milan, *Hel.* 20, 76 (CSEL 32.2, 458). See also Boniface Ramsey, “Almsgiving in the Latin Church: The Late Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries,” *Theological Studies* 43 (1982): 226–259.

4 For John’s exaltation of almsgiving over virginity, see *hom. in Mt.* 77.5 (PG 58, 709); *hom. in Jo.* 81.3 (PG 59, 441); and *hom. in Tit.* 6.2–3 (PG 62, 698). For the necessity of almsgiving for salvation, see *hom. in Mt.* 47.4 (PG 58, 486) and *poenit.* 3.3 (PG 49, 296). For John’s claim that

ments, even when compared with other well-known proponents of almsgiving in the third–fifth centuries, such as Cyprian, Ambrose, Basil, and Augustine.

One reason John ranks almsgiving above other ascetic practices is because it not only benefits the donor, or even the recipient, but “all,” including the Christian community and society as a whole. A second reason for almsgiving’s superior ranking, according to John, is because of its gradual, transformative effect on the soul.

This [almsgiving] is better even than fasting or lying on the ground; they may be more arduous and painful, but this is more profitable. It enlightens the soul, makes it sleek, beautiful, and youthful (φωτίζει ψυχὴν, λιπαίνει, καλὴν καὶ ὡραίαν ποιεῖ) .... He who takes care to show mercy to the one in need, will soon leave greediness behind, he who perseveres in giving to the poor, will soon desert anger, and will never even be prideful.<sup>5</sup>

Almsgiving not only heals vices such as greed and envy, but also frees one from anger and pride and even divinizes donors by making them merciful like God.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the benefits of almsgiving for donors go beyond simply freeing them from the punishment due to their sins. According to John, almsgiving leads to moral transformation and growth in virtue.

## 1 Almsgiving as Competition for Power and Influence

Wendy Mayer, Michael DeVinne, Richard Finn, and Daniel Caner have authored works that respond to the theses put forth by Évelyne Patlagean and Peter Brown concerning the transformation of Roman society from a “civic model” to an “economic model.”<sup>7</sup> Patlagean was the first to argue for this transformation in *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4e–7e siècles*,

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almsgiving cleanses every sin, see *hom. in Ac.* 25.3 (PG 60, 196). For John’s assertion that almsgiving counterbalances all one’s sins, see *poenit* 3.1 (PG 49, 293).

<sup>5</sup> *hom. in Jo.* 81.3 (PG 59, 442).

<sup>6</sup> Although John never uses the technical terms for deification such as θέωσις and θεοποίησις, he does specifically say that almsgiving makes one “like God.” See *hom. in Heb.* 32.3 (PG 63, 223); *hom. in Tit.* 6.2 (PG 62, 698); and *hom. in Mt.* 71.3 (PG 58, 666).

<sup>7</sup> By “civic model,” Brown and other scholars refer to how society was divided between the citizens and non-citizens, and by “economic model,” they mean how society came to be divided between the “rich” and the “poor.”

published in 1977.<sup>8</sup> Brown expanded on her thesis in *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (1992) and *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (2002) by arguing that Christian bishops, through their efforts to stylize themselves as patrons and governors of the poor, were primarily responsible in effecting this change.<sup>9</sup> Michael De Vinne, in his unpublished 1995 dissertation, “The Advocacy of Empty Bellies: Episcopal Representation of the Poor in the Late Roman Empire,” further argued that bishops, such as Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom, through seeking to heighten the visibility of the poor through their sermons, aided their own ascendancy to power. He contends that the bishops “radically” amplified the earlier redemptive role accorded to the poor and that this “consequent monopolization of almsgiving” helped to solidify them as “megapatrons of their communities, investing them with both political and religious authority.”<sup>10</sup>

Daniel Caner, however, in *Wandering Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (2002), demonstrated that episcopal power began to be challenged by another emerging force within Christianity, highlighting how Christian bishops and homeless monks competed with each other in collecting alms as a means for gaining spiritual authority.<sup>11</sup> Shortly thereafter in 2006, Wendy Mayer, utilizing homilies primarily from John Chrysostom’s corpus, made a convincing case that a new strand should be added to Patlagean’s and Brown’s models. She argued that while the church did indeed have many structures in place for providing for the economic poor, individuals preferred to give money to the ascetics or “voluntary poor” and continued to be suspicious of and even disdain the economic poor.<sup>12</sup> She

8 Évelyne Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4e–7e siècles* (Paris: Mouton, 1977), esp. 190.

9 Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Toward a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 101–102; idem, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002), 8 and 77.

10 Michael De Vinne, “The Advocacy of Empty Bellies: Episcopal Representation of the Poor in the Late Roman Empire,” unpub. Ph.D. Diss. (Stanford University, 1995), iv.

11 Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), esp. 158–205. See also Peter Brown, *Treasure in Heaven: The Holy Poor in Early Christianity* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 104, 109–110.

12 Wendy Mayer, “Poverty and generosity towards the poor in the time of John Chrysostom,” in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan R. Holman, Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 140–158 (149–154). See also idem, “Poverty and society in the world of John Chrysostom,” in W. Bowden, A. Gutteridge and C. Machado, eds., *Social and Political Life in Late Antiquity*, Late Antique Archaeology 3.1, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 465–484 (479–480).

describes this as a “gradual redirection of public benefaction away from citizens of the earthly polis towards the ascetics ... citizens *par excellence* of the eternal polis of heaven.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, Christians continued to bequeath large sums of money to their cities in accordance with the traditional model of civic benefaction.<sup>14</sup> Mayer’s insights have highlighted the various competition that existed among bishops, ascetics, and Greco-Roman euergetism for the patronage of the wealthy.

Also calling attention to this competition in the solicitation of alms and adding to the list of competitors other clergy and Jews, Richard Finn, in *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice*, 313–450 (2006), has likewise qualified Brown’s thesis by explaining that bishops were thus limited in their ability to promote themselves as civic patrons through their care of the poor.<sup>15</sup> Another major contribution of Finn is that he seeks to demonstrate how the episcopal discourse on almsgiving shaped its practice and invested it with meaning.<sup>16</sup>

In 2021, Caner published *The Rich and the Pure: Philanthropy and the Making of Christian Society in Early Byzantium*, in which he distinguished almsgiving from other types of religious gifts such as charity, blessings, firstfruits, and offerings. While his earlier book called attention to the competition between monks and bishops in the fourth century, this later work is centered more on the role of monks as Caner demonstrates that monks began to replace bishops as patrons of and mediators for the poor during the fifth century.<sup>17</sup> It is also

13 Mayer, “Poverty and society,” 483.

14 Ibid.

15 Richard Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice* 313–450 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 260–266.

16 Ibid., 4–5 and 32–33. Both Mayer and Finn also nuance De Vinne’s claim that the bishops sought to make the poor more visible. Mayer does this by pointing out how John Chrysostom only occasionally provided details regarding the appearance of the beggars and more often highlighted their behavior in order to invert the negative response of his auditors to said behavior, and Finn accomplishes this by showing how late antique bishops, such as Augustine, avoided describing the poor in too specific of terms so as not to stir up even more contempt for them by the rich. See Mayer, “John Chrysostom on Poverty,” in *Preaching Poverty in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Realities*, eds. Pauline Allen, Bronwen Neil, and Wendy Mayer, *Arbeiten zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte* 28 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2009), 108; and Finn, “Portraying the Poor: descriptions of poverty in Christian texts of the late Roman Empire,” in Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne, eds., *Poverty in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 130–144, esp. 131 and 144.

17 Daniel Caner, *The Rich and the Pure: Philanthropy and the Making of Christian Society in Early Byzantium* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021), 154.

in the fifth–seventh centuries that these latter three gift categories emerged. Thus, the majority of the book focuses on this later period.

My book does not primarily focus on competition in almsgiving, but I do explain how John competed with each of these various groups in chapter six. While I concur with the general conclusions of the scholars mentioned above, I occasionally differ with some of them on specific points. I also pay more attention to John's specific context in Antioch and Constantinople than do Brown, Caner, and Finn, describing the various Christian sects and monastic groups in these cities, as well as the sizable Jewish population in Antioch to which a large number of John's congregants felt drawn. Finally, I point out how even the not-so-wealthy members of John's churches might have been tempted to neglect the poor in their pursuit of honor.

## 2 Almsgiving as Social Justice and a Ransom for Sin

There have been two other trends in the literature related to Christian views of almsgiving in early and late antiquity. One trend, particularly regarding John Chrysostom, is to portray him as a social reformer and defender of the poor, always eager to combat the exploitation of society's weaker members. These scholars have focused on John's views on private property and the common good and/or his efforts to reform society through a redistribution of wealth. They agree that John was a reformer, but they disagree as to whether he was primarily trying to transform the individual, the household (οἶκος), or society as a whole. Margaret M. Mitchell and Blake Leyerle argue that John was primarily trying to transform the individual; Aileen M. Hartney contends that John was trying to transform the household; and Arnold Stötzel, Adolf Martin Ritter, and André Dupleix maintain that John was aiming to transform the entire society.<sup>18</sup>

18 Margaret M. Mitchell, "Silver Chamber Pots and Other Goods Which Are Not Good: John Chrysostom's Discourse against Wealth and Possessions," in William Schweiker and Charles Mathewes, eds., *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 88–121; Blake Leyerle, "John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money," *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 29–47; Aileen M. Hartney, *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City* (London: Duckworth, 2004), 124–128, 177; idem., "Men, Women, and Money—John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City," in *Studia Patristica* 37, ed. M.F. Wiles and E.J. Yarnold with assistance of P.M. Parvis (Louvain: Peeters, 2001), 527–534 (530); Arnold Stötzel, *Kirche als "neue Gesellschaft": Die humanisierende Wirkung des Christentums nach Johannes Chrysostomus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1984), esp. 71–90; Adolf Martin Ritter, "Between 'Theocracy' and 'Simple Life': Dio Chrysostom, John Chrysostom, and the Problem of Humanizing Soci-



Another trend, exemplified primarily by biblical scholars, is to call attention to the discourse in early Christianity centered around almsgiving's ability to remit the donor's post-baptismal sin. This view of almsgiving is known as "redemptive" or "atoning" almsgiving (the precise meaning of which will be explained more below). Although not the first to call attention to the early Christian notion that almsgiving could forgive sins, Roman Garrison, in his 1993 work, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity*, certainly ignited scholarly interest in the topic. Garrison traces the development of "redemptive almsgiving" from the Hebrew scriptures through Christianity's first two centuries. His basic thesis is that although Second Temple texts, such as Tobit, Sirach, and the Greek version of Daniel taught redemptive almsgiving and the New Testament allowed for the idea, the Apostolic Fathers refined and developed the doctrine for a two-fold purpose: to deal with sins committed after baptism and to resolve the tension between the rich and poor in Christian communities.<sup>19</sup>

Gary Anderson supplements Garrison's work on redemptive almsgiving through two books, *Sin: A History* and *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition*, as well as several essays and articles.<sup>20</sup> Anderson's main contribution has been to trace the roots of redemptive almsgiving within both rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity to the Second Temple period. He also goes beyond Garrison in arguing that the idea of redemptive almsgiving was

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ety," in *Studia Patristica* 22, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Louvain: Peeters, 1989), 170–180. Longer German version published as "Zwischen 'Gottesherrschaft' und 'einfachem Leben': Dio Chrysostomus, Joannes Chrysostomus, und das Problem einer Humanisierung der Gesellschaft," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 31 (1988): 127–143; and André Dupleix, "John Chrysostome. Un évêque social face à l'Empire," in André Dupleix, ed., *Recherches et Tradition: Mélanges Patristiques Offerts à Henri Crouzel, S.J.* Théologie Historique 88 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1992), 119–139.

19 Roman Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 133–134.

20 Gary Anderson, "Redeem Your Sins by the Giving of Alms: Sin, Debt, and the 'Treasury of Merit' in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition," *Letter and Spirit* 3 (2007): 39–69; idem., *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); idem., "Redeem Your Sins through Works of Charity," in *To Train His Soul in Books: Syriac Asceticism in Early Christianity*, ed. Robin Darling Young and Monica Blanchard (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 57–65; idem., "How Does Almsgiving Purge Sin?" in *Hebrew in the Second Temple Period: The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and of Other Contemporary Sources*, ed. Steven E. Fassberg, Moshe Bar-Asher, and Ruth A. Clements, *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah* 108 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1–14; idem., *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); idem., "A Treasury in Heaven: The Exegesis of Proverbs 10:2 in the Second Temple Period," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 2.1 (2013): 351–367.

present in Jewish Scriptures prior to their translation into Greek (in Daniel and certain wisdom Psalms and Proverbs.)<sup>21</sup> Anderson's work regarding the origins of redemptive almsgiving is compelling. Unfortunately, in his eagerness to call attention to the economic framework of redemptive almsgiving, he has made it sound as if "debt" was the only metaphor used for sin during the Second Temple period and beyond.<sup>22</sup>

Peter Brown has also examined the doctrine and practice of redemptive almsgiving in late antique Western Christians, such as Ambrose, Jerome, Pelagius, Augustine, and Paulinus of Nola. His books, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (2012) and *Treasure in Heaven* (2016) touch on this theme,<sup>23</sup> but it is in *The Ransom of the Soul* (2015), that he treats redemptive almsgiving in-depth. Although his main concern is the association between redemptive almsgiving and frightening views of the afterlife that developed in the West after Augustine's death, he focuses on Augustine's doctrine of redemptive almsgiving in the third chapter and particularly emphasizes the Pelagian controversy as the context in which Augustine refined his beliefs. Despite the insights of his work, such as pointing out that all Christians were expected to give alms regularly and in small sums to atone for everyday sins, Brown, because he relies on Anderson, focuses exclusively on the financial imagery associated with almsgiving.<sup>24</sup> He discusses the images of almsgiving as paying off the debt of sin, loaning to God only later to be repaid with extravagant interest, and storing up treasure in heaven, but he does not mention how almsgiving served to inculcate virtue in the donor or any benefits of almsgiving other than the forgiveness of sins and heavenly reward. Finally, although his books provide a solid social history of redemptive almsgiving in the West, they do not treat the Eastern perspective on the doctrine.<sup>25</sup>

21 Anderson, "Redeem Your Sin by the Giving of Alms," 42–45, 48–50.

22 Anderson, "Chapter 3: A Debt to Be Repaid," in *Sin*, 27–39.

23 Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 A.D.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), see especially Chp. 22, 359–368; and idem, *Treasure in Heaven*, 6–8, 46–47. In this latter book, Brown focuses on how the poor recipients of alms prayed for their rich benefactors, but he does not discuss how almsgiving, itself forgave sin, whether the recipient prayed for the donor or not.

24 For the frequency and quantity of almsgiving prescribed by Augustine, see Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul: Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 99–106. For the financial imagery associated with almsgiving, see *ibid.*, 96–98.

25 Although Brown does discuss Eastern perspectives on almsgiving in Egypt in Syria in *Treasure in Heaven*, the issue he is concerned with is whether monks were considered eligible to receive alms or expected to provide for their own needs through manual labor.

More recently, David J. Downs in *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity* (2016), has skillfully pointed out other metaphors both Scripture and early Christians used for sin and for describing how almsgiving dealt with sin, such as cleansing, extinguishing, covering, canceling, and lightening the burden of sin.<sup>26</sup> This has been an important step in expanding our understanding of the Jewish and early Christian views of sin and its effects, as well as how almsgiving might counter those effects.

### 3 Almsgiving as Therapy of the Soul and Deification

Several scholars, particularly Panayiotis Papageorgiou and Claire Salem, have recently drawn attention to John's view of sin as a sickness, specifically, a mental illness.<sup>27</sup> Wendy Mayer, in several essays and articles, has claimed that John saw himself more as a "psychagogue" or healer of souls than as a theologian and has shown how, particularly in two treatises and one letter written from exile (*Ad eos qui scandalizatur*, *Quod nemo laeditur*, and *ep. 17 ad Olympiadem*), John is not using sin as a metaphor but understands it as a genuine sickness of the soul.<sup>28</sup> She further explains how this accords with the ancient view of health

26 David J. Downs, *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016). Downs specifically critiques Anderson for forcing biblical texts to fit into his "economic metaphor for sin" and for ignoring "the diversity of metaphors used in early Jewish and Christian literature to describe sin and its solution (69)." See also Boniface Ramsey, "Almsgiving in the Latin Church: The Late Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries," *Theological Studies* 43 (1982): 226–259, who points out cleansing and healing metaphors employed by such authors as Chromatius of Aquileia and Maximus of Turin and Emmanuel Clapsis, "The Dignity of the Poor and Almsgiving in St. John Chrysostom," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 56 (2011): 55–87, who also does not focus solely on financial metaphors for how almsgiving dealt with sin but describes how John viewed almsgiving's cleansing effects on an equal level with baptism. Eric P. Costanzo, *Harbor for the Poor: A Missiological Analysis of Almsgiving in the View and Practice of John Chrysostom* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013), draws attention to the healing effects that almsgiving is intended to produce in John's thought. Unfortunately, he projects Reformation concerns back into John's day and employs anachronistic terminology when discussing John's view of salvation (108).

27 See Panayiotis Papageorgiou, "A Theological Analysis of Selected Themes in the Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans," (unpublished PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1995), esp. 52, 239, and 242; and Claire Elayne Salem, "Sanity, Insanity, and Man's Being as Understood by St. John Chrysostom," (unpublished PhD dissertation, Durham University, 2010), esp. 5, 8, and 72.

28 Wendy Mayer, "The Persistence in Late Antiquity of Medico-Philosophical Psychic Therapy," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 8.2 (2015): 337–351, esp. 340, note 16 and 350. See also idem,

and illness in which the soul and body were not separate, but parts of an integrated whole. Junghun Bae has furthered this strand of research by pointing out that John saw almsgiving as correcting the imbalance in the soul caused by disordered passions, and therefore, healing not only sins such as greed and extortion, but serving as a panacea for all sins.<sup>29</sup> His recently published monograph, *John Chrysostom: On Almsgiving and the Therapy of the Soul*, particularly highlights the importance of Greco-Roman philosophical therapy for understanding John's view of almsgiving.<sup>30</sup>

These findings on sin as a type of insanity or mental illness align nicely with the work of Raymond Laird, who has studied the role of the γνῶμη (mindset) in John's soteriology.<sup>31</sup> Although not emphasizing the medical and psychological terminology as much, he usefully uncovers John's understanding of sin as a serious, chronic condition which humans must address through attentiveness to and application of the teachings of the Christian scriptures, the reception of the Eucharist, and repentance, including almsgiving and the remembrance of one's past sins.<sup>32</sup>

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"Shaping the Sick Soul: Reshaping the Identity of John Chrysostom," in *Christians Shaping Identity from the Roman Empire to Byzantium, Studies Inspired by Pauline Allen*, eds. Geoffrey Dunn and Wendy Mayer. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 132 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 140–164; and idem, "Medicine in Transition: Christian Adaptation in the Later Fourth-Century East," in *Shifting Genres in Late Antiquity*, eds. Geoffrey Greatrex, Hugh Elton, and Lucas McMahon (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 11–26.

29 Junghun Bae, *John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Therapy of the Soul*, Patristic Studies in Global Perspective 1 (Leiden: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2021), 49–53, 70–85 (esp. 84–85), and 188.

30 Besides the monographs by Bae and Costanzo (see note 26), there has been one other monograph on John's view of almsgiving, *Das Almosen bei Johannes Chrysostomus*, published by Otto Plassman in 1961. He treats a variety of themes, including: the rewards of almsgiving for the donor, almsgiving compared to other donations, almsgiving compared to other virtues, and the relation of the rich and poor to vice and virtue. He also spends considerable time sketching a portrait of the donors and recipients according to John's descriptions, draws attention to the theme of God as a debtor, and comments on the importance of almsgiving as a remedy for greed according to John. The book is more of a reference work, however, providing no direct quotations from John, not interacting at all with the secondary literature, and failing to offer any historical or literary context for any of John's claims on the benefits of almsgiving. It is useful in providing a broad overview of the various aspects of John's doctrine of almsgiving, but it does not treat any aspects of John's theology of almsgiving in-depth.

31 Raymond Laird, *Mindset, Moral Choice and Sin in the Anthropology of John Chrysostom*, Early Christian Studies 15 (Strathfield, Australia: St. Paul's Publications, 2012), esp. 255.

32 Ibid., 127–133. Although not stressing medical terminology, Laird does speak of John's use of the term "healthy mindset (ὑγιής γνῶμη)" on pages 42–43, 65–66, 100, and 245.

Going beyond how almsgiving counters the effects of sin, some Chrysostom scholars have shown that he taught almsgiving could make one “like God.” Pak-Wah Lai has demonstrated that John put forward a soteriology influenced by and similar to deification as taught by Irenaeus, the Alexandrians, and the Cappadocians, and Maria Verhoeff has suggested that John’s friendship with God discourse is one metaphor by which he expresses this concept of deification.<sup>33</sup>

The work of these scholars is helpful in demonstrating that sin was not simply an act of disobedience or something that could be dealt with through money alone. Laird has insightfully explained the depth of John’s hamartiology and the role of repentance in reversing sin’s effects. Mayer, Salem, Bae, and Papageorgiou have shown that, for John, sin could be persistent and required not only remedies, but also one who was skilled in the application of those remedies, a “psychagogue” or “spiritual doctor,” such as himself.<sup>34</sup> Verhoeff has discerned that John saw other spiritual benefits deriving from almsgiving than the forgiveness of sins, namely, friendship with God and deification. I find these analyses beneficial, and I see myself as building upon the work of these scholars to some degree, especially in chapter three. This is not my only aim, however. In addition to explaining how almsgiving contributed to growth in virtue in John’s scheme of salvation, I also identify key social factors that led John to emphasize almsgiving over other virtues and ascetic practices and to make stronger statements than many of his Christian contemporaries regarding almsgiving’s ability to eradicate sin.

33 Pak-Wah Lai, “John Chrysostom and the Hermeneutics of Exemplar Portraits,” (Durham University, 2010), esp. 141–152; Maria Verhoeff, “More Desirable than Light Itself: Friendship Discourse in John Chrysostom’s Soteriology,” (unpublished PhD dissertation, Louvain: Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, 2016), esp. 165–193. See also idem., “A Genuine Friend Wishes to be a Debtor: John Chrysostom’s Discourse on Almsgiving Reinterpreted,” *Sacrus Erudiri* 52 (2013): 47–66; and Rudolf Brändle, *Matth. 25, 31–46 im Werk des Johannes Chrysostomos: Ein Beitrag zur Auslegungsgeschichte und zur Erforschung der Ethik der griechischen Kirche um die Wende vom. 4 Zum 5. Jahrhundert*, Beiträge Zur Geschichte der Biblischen Exegese 22 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1979), 148; idem., “This Sweetest Passage: Matthew 25:31–46 and Assistance to the Poor in the Homilies of John Chrysostom,” in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan R. Holman, 127–139 (131).

34 See Mayer, “The Persistence in Late Antiquity of Medico-Philosophical Psychic Therapy,” 348, for reference to John as a psychagogue; and Papageorgiou, 269; and Salem, 212, for reference to John as a spiritual doctor. Laird sees John’s role as more of an educator, describing his vocation as “educating the γνῶμη” on p. 260.

#### 4      **The Far-Reaching Benefits of Almsgiving**

In this book, I argue that John conceptualized almsgiving as a salvific act, in which benefits accrued to the donor, the recipient, and the Christian community at large. I thus seek to balance three representations in the scholarship that have, at times, been overly emphasized: first, the tendency to discuss almsgiving simply as a means of “paying the debt” of the donor’s post-baptismal sin; second, the tendency to portray John’s view of almsgiving solely in light of modern social justice concerns; and third, the tendency to portray the motivation behind this discourse purely in terms of competition for power and influence.

Regarding the first tendency, I argue that John saw almsgiving as doing more than simply counterbalancing or canceling the debt of sin. John viewed sin primarily through the effects it had on the soul, and he employed cleansing, rejuvenating, and healing metaphors to communicate how almsgiving reversed those effects. For John, almsgiving worked on sin progressively. It started by healing opposite vices such as greed and envy and then gradually made the soul merciful, instilling in the donor a genuine concern for his neighbor. Almsgiving even deified the donor, making them merciful through an imitation of God’s mercy to humanity.

Regarding the second tendency, while John was genuinely concerned for the earthly plight of the poor and did argue for a more equal distribution of wealth through organized and individual charity, as a Christian pastor, he was more focused on addressing people’s spiritual needs than their physical needs. He was primarily concerned with people’s souls and their eternal salvation. Since he defined almsgiving so broadly, it was a means of saving both the rich and the poor from eternal damnation. The poor were not saved through their poverty; they were expected to give alms as well. Furthermore, alms could be given on behalf of deceased baptized Christians and catechumens, helping to improve their status in the afterlife. Thus, almsgiving not only served to provide temporary relief from earthly suffering, but eternal bliss for its practitioners and mitigation of suffering for the dead not in heaven.

Regarding the third tendency, while I devote an entire chapter to how John competed with various groups in Antioch and Constantinople in patronizing the poor, this was not the only reason John promoted almsgiving. In chapter four, I discuss how he promoted almsgiving as an alternative to harsher forms of penance used in other places throughout the empire, and in chapter five, I show how he used almsgiving to unite the married and celibates and rich and poor within his congregations.

While this book is devoted to John Chrysostom’s view of almsgiving and highlights his more intense focus on this topic, I do not believe John was totally

unique in his understanding of almsgiving's spiritual and communal benefits. As I demonstrate in chapter two, although John goes farther in some of his remarks regarding almsgiving's benefits and power to deal with sin, other of his contemporaries make similar, albeit more muted, statements. At times, John's statements are comparable to those made by Christians in the West, such as Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome. John was not the only Christian to speak of almsgiving's healing effects on the donor or how one could encounter Christ in the person of the poor or how almsgiving helped to create unity within the church and society. John, like Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and many other bishops of this period, saw his primary role as a pastor whose responsibility was the spiritual health of his members, both on an individual and communal level. One of the aims of this book, therefore, is to demonstrate that the late antique Christian discourse on almsgiving was not only about expiating the sins of the rich or relieving the suffering of the poor or even about gaining power. It was also about expiating the sins of the poor, unifying the Christian community on earth and in heaven, and making humans like God. For John and other Christian leaders of the time, almsgiving could indeed save one from eternal death and physical hunger, but it was salvific and transformative on other levels as well.

## 5 Definition of Terms

First, I define "almsgiving" very broadly, in line with John. I understand it to mean any act of mercy done on behalf of those in need.<sup>35</sup> This includes the acts of mercy mentioned in Matt. 25:31–46, but is not limited to these.<sup>36</sup> While most scholars do not offer a precise definition of the term "redemptive almsgiving," they all seem to agree that it entails the idea that almsgiving can atone for sin or save one from the consequences of sin.<sup>37</sup> The problem with the term "redemp-

35 The Greek word for almsgiving is ἐλεημοσύνη and can also mean mercy, leading John to understand ἐλεημοσύνη as using whatever gifts or resources one possesses in order to help others. See G.W.H. Lampe, ed. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 447; and John Chrysostom, *hom. in Mt.* 78.3 (PG 58, 714–715) and *exp. in Ps.* 128.1 (PG 55, 367–368), both of which are discussed in detail in chapter one.

36 These include feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick and visiting those in prison. John makes frequent reference to this passage in his homilies, particularly when preaching on almsgiving.

37 Garrison, one of the first scholars to introduce the term, defines "redemptive almsgiving" as alms given as a ransom for sin. See idem, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity*, 10. Garrison's definition is based on one meaning of the verb, *to redeem*: "to ransom (a per-

tive," however, is that it is tied to financial imagery, and early Christians used other metaphors to discuss how almsgiving dealt with sin. In order to encourage people to see almsgiving more broadly, I will only speak of almsgiving as "redemptive" or as "forgiving" or "remitting" sin when John employs financial language to convey how almsgiving eliminates the record of sin. Specifically, I define "redemptive almsgiving" as providing material assistance to the poor to repay the debt of one's own sins or the sins of others.

In addition to speaking of how almsgiving pays the debt of sin, John also speaks of almsgiving as saving one from the eternal consequences of sin (i.e. eternal death or damnation) and as reversing the spiritual effects of sin on the soul. For example, sin sickens, ages, and stains the soul. Almsgiving has the power to reverse these processes and remove these effects. The former might be termed "salvific almsgiving" and the latter "transformative almsgiving." I will not employ these distinctions frequently, however, as John often uses several metaphors in the same passage or homily. He may talk about how almsgiving cleanses, heals, and ransoms one from sin all within a few sentences. In these instances, John is not aiming to elucidate exactly how almsgiving works on sin, but is drawing on varied imagery to make an appeal to his audience.<sup>38</sup> When

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son) from slavery, captivity, or punishment." See third definition for "redeem," in *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Online at: <http://www.oed.com.ezp.slu.edu/view/Entry/160234?rskey=Q31KdJ&result=2> (accessed 01 April 2020). This definition is also faithful to the corresponding New Testament term, λυτρώω: "to free by paying a ransom, *redeem*." See "λυτρώω," in Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. by Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 606. David Downs, "Redemptive Almsgiving and Economic Stratification in 1st Clement," 493, on the other hand, does not limit "redemptive almsgiving" to financial imagery and defines the term to denote the idea among ancient theologians that "providing material assistance to the needy redeems (or cancels, or cleanses) sin." In his most recent work, *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity*, 7, Downs uses the term "atoning almsgiving" rather than "redemptive almsgiving," and defines this even more broadly as "canceling, cleansing, covering, extinguishing, lightening, or in some way, atoning for human sin and/or its consequences." Bronwen Neil, "Models of Gift Giving in the Preaching of Leo the Great," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 18 (2010): 225–259 (225), defines it as "giving alms in order to attain one's own salvation."

38 See Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley, CA: University of Californian Press, 1991), 57; and David Rylaarsdam, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy: The Coherence of his Theology and Preaching*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 239–269 for how fourth-century Christian preachers employed word-pictures and corporeal images to communicate higher, spiritual truths to their audiences.



discussing such passages, therefore, I will use more general and neutral terms such as “atone,” “eliminate,” “eradicate,” “expunge,” “cancel,” “deal with,” and “erase.”<sup>39</sup> These terms may strike some readers as vague and imprecise, but I will not attempt to be precise where John is not. Another reason for this broad terminology is to avoid imposing modern theological categories on John’s largely metaphorical language.

## 6 Developing Ideas on Sin, Repentance, and Giving in the Late Fourth Century

By the time John was ordained a priest c. 386, charity to the poor was already a well-established Christian virtue; however, exactly when, where, and how this giving was supposed to occur was not uniformly prescribed. Although some preachers such as John and Augustine suggested tithing, there is no record of compulsory tithing until the first half of the sixth century.<sup>40</sup> While it does appear that in some churches by this time, there was a regular offering at the weekly *synaxis*, it seems that in other churches, people may have dropped their offerings into an alms-box either before or after the service. Although John encouraged his parishioners to give directly to beggars, other preachers preferred that people give to the church who would in turn distribute the offerings to those they deemed legitimately needy.<sup>41</sup>

Also, during this time there was a huge concern over how to atone for sins committed after baptism. While there was general agreement that these sins needed to be expiated in some way and that almsgiving was one such appropriate means, some Christian bishops, such as Basil of Caesarea, claimed that almsgiving only dealt with sins having to do with money such as greed or selfishness while others like Ambrose and John viewed almsgiving as having more widespread applicability.<sup>42</sup>

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39 Another option would be to choose a word such as “atone” (following Downs, *Alms*, 8–11) or “expiate” (following Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul*, 96–98) and use this word consistently throughout; however, I find this approach too restrictive when discussing how John sees almsgiving as acting on sin. Both “atone” and “expiate” suggest appeasing God, or, more positively, reconciling humans to God, but this is typically not the primary function of almsgiving in the literary and rhetorical contexts of John’s remarks.

40 See Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 52 and “Quantity and Method of Almsgiving” in chapter one of this book.

41 See *Const. App.* 3.4.2–3 (SC 329, 126).

42 See Basil of Caesarea, *reg. br.* 271 (PL 31, 1269); Ambrose of Milan, *De helia et ieiunio* 20, 76 in C. Schenkl, ed. CSEL 32, 2 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1897); and John Chrysostom,

While prayer, fasting, almsgiving, weeping for one's sins, confession to a priest or other spiritual guide, and forgiving others were all approved methods of atoning for everyday sins, there was still heated debate whether and how sins such as murder, adultery, or apostasy could be remitted during this lifetime.<sup>43</sup> Although penance was not viewed as a sacrament like baptism and the Eucharist, it was typically reserved for serious sins and was a formal, public, and lengthy process in many churches. How the process was carried out varied widely according to location, but abstention from the Eucharist and even exiting the assembly during this part of the liturgy appears to be one of the standard penalties imposed. The duration of penance for some sins could be as long as fifteen–twenty years or even a lifetime, but some bishop-monks maintained that the terms of penance could be shortened if the penitent manifested sincere contrition and amendment of life.<sup>44</sup>

Although I will explain these contexts more in-depth in individual chapters, I make mention of them here to underline that the late fourth and early fifth century was a formative time for Christianity. John's voice was one among many. In some ways it was unique; in some ways it was familiar, but due to his influential position as the patriarch of Constantinople and even as a priest in Antioch, a major center of Christian learning, his voice should not be ignored when attempting to understand the development of Christian theology and practice during this period. Especially throughout chapters two–four, I will compare his ideas and teachings with other Christian leaders in both the East and West to discern where his thought aligned with and diverged from his contemporaries.

## 7 Primary Sources and John's Rhetoric

There is no indication that John ever wrote a treatise on almsgiving.<sup>45</sup> Almost all of John's teaching on the subject is found within his homilies, particularly

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*hom. in Ac.* 25.3 (PG 60, 196); and *idem, poenit.* 3.1 (PG 49, 293). This topic is discussed in detail in chapter two.

43 See chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of this topic.

44 See Alexis Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity: Eastern Asceticism and the Framing of the Christian Life c. 400–650 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 283–286.

45 No treatises from John survive on the topic of almsgiving; however, he has at least one authentic homily on the topic, *De Eleemosyna* (CPG 4382). There is a consensus among scholars that the other works by this title are spurious as well as any other works with “*eleemosyna*” in the title. Regarding CPG 4618, see P.P. Verbraken, “Deux anciennes versions latines de l’homélie sur l’aumône CPG 4618 attribuée à Jean Chrysostome,” in J. Noret et al., eds. *ANTIDORON. Hulde aan Dr Maurits Geerard bij de voltooiing van de Clavis Patrum*

within his closing remarks. It is also likely that John delivered most of his homilies extemporaneously.<sup>46</sup> One must remember, therefore, that John's comments on almsgiving were aimed at a mostly lay Christian audience with the purpose of spurring his listeners toward generosity. As David Rylaarsdam has convincingly argued, John adapted his speech to the capacity of his audience in imitation of God's *συνκατάβασις* (condescension) and did not hesitate to employ all the tools in his rhetorical arsenal in order to accomplish this end.<sup>47</sup> In fact, his audience not only expected this rhetoric; some came specifically to be entertained by it.<sup>48</sup> This does not mean that one cannot discern within John's statements something of his theology, but it does mean that one should not seek to reconstruct a precise, systematized theology out of these comments. John was not a systematic theologian in the modern sense of the term. His main concerns were pastoral, his primary motivations were to teach and persuade, and his principal natural giftedness and training were in rhetoric.<sup>49</sup>

Besides the authentic homily, *De Eleemosyna* (CPG 4382), other works in which John frequently discusses almsgiving include: *In Matthaeum*, *In Acta Apostolorum*, *In Joannem*, *In Genesim*, *In illud: Habentes eundem spiritum*, *De Paenitentia*,<sup>50</sup> *In Epistulum i ad Corinthios*, *In Epistulum ii Corinthios*, *In Epistu-*

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Graecorum/*Hommage à Maurits Geerard pour célébrer l'achèvement de la Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, Wetteren: Belgium Cultura, 1984, 33–45; No one has published any research on CPG 4502, 4585, 4626, 4678, or 4705. CPG 4925, 4985, 5009, and 5071 are among the *Inedita*.

- 46 See Jaclyn L. Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity: John Chrysostom and His Congregation in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6–7, who explains, “The texts [John's homilies] contain all of the marks of impromptu speeches: repetitions, tangents, incomplete thoughts, and references to the audience's applause or evident boredom.” Nevertheless, she acknowledges that John may have polished his homilies after they were written down.
- 47 Rylaarsdam, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy*, esp. 6–7 and Chp. 2.
- 48 See Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity*, 62; and Rylaarsdam, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy*, 208–213. Maxwell and Rylaarsdam point out that although John was aware of his audience's expectations and discouraged fellow clerics from simply telling the people what they wanted to hear, he also thought it important that preachers knew how to employ rhetoric effectively.
- 49 See also *Ibid.*, 6–7, where Rylaarsdam points out that John's theology is rhetorical rather than speculative or metaphysical.
- 50 Concerning the disputed homilies in *De Paenitentia* (5, 7, 8, and 9), I consider homilies 5, 8, and 9 as genuine, but homily 7 as spurious. See Charles Martin, “Une homélie De poenitentia de Sévérien de Gabala,” *Revue d'Histoire ecclésiastique* 26 (1930): 331–343. See also Sever Voicu, “A Lost Coptic Fragment from a Sermon on Penitence by Severian of Gabala (CPG 4186),” at <http://alinsuciu.com/2012/05/02/a-lost-coptic-fragment-from-a-sermon-on-penitence-by-severian-of-gabala-cpg-4186/> (accessed 9 March 2016). Despite the notes in the CPG casting doubt on the genuineness of these works, other than for

*lum ad Hebraeos, In Epistulum ad Philippenses, In Epistulum ad Romanos, and In Epistulum ii ad Timotheum*.<sup>51</sup> All these are collections of homilies, and with the exception of *De Paenitentia*, all are series on biblical books or verses. I have included all these sources in my work. My study is not limited to the above works, however, but has utilized John's entire corpus, excluding only those texts that the majority of scholars have determined are spurious.

Regarding John's statements on the actual conditions of poverty in Antioch and Constantinople, his proposed solutions for solving poverty, and the negligence of his congregants in giving alms to the involuntary poor, I take it for granted that he, at times, used hyperbole and certainly was selective in which part of the picture he presented. In chapter one, therefore, I attempt to determine the accuracy of his remarks by referring to modern research concerning poverty in ancient cities as well as information on poverty and almsgiving provided by both his eastern and western contemporaries. This allows me to provide as accurate a representation as possible of the practice of almsgiving in John's congregations.

Regarding John's claims on the potency of almsgiving to deal with post-baptismal sin discussed in chapter two and the plethora of other benefits he ascribes to this practice presented in chapter three, I take his remarks seriously. Although John makes his appeals "*as rhetoric*," as Margaret Mitchell has so aptly shown regarding John's proposed solutions for ending poverty, this does not mean he is not earnest in his remarks.<sup>52</sup> His claims surpass those of other early and late antique Christians, many of whom were also skilled rhetoricians. The

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homily 7, no literature has been published on the homilies to prove their inauthenticity. Furthermore, some scholars have presented compelling evidence for their genuineness. See Constantine Loukakis, *The Works of St. John Chrysostom, vol. 1* (Athens: The Word, 1970), 144; Mavritii Geerard, ed. *Clavis Patrum Graecorum 11 (Ab Athanasio ad Chrysostomum)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1974), 499; and Gus Christo, "Introduction," in *St. John Chrysostom: On Repentance and Almsgiving*. Fathers of the Church 96 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1998), xv–xvi; however, see S.J. Voicu, "La volontà e il caso: La tipologia dei primi spuri di Crisostomo," in *Giovanni Crisostomo: Oriente e Occidente tra IV e V secolo, XXXIII Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana, Roma, 6–8 maggio 2004*, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 93 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2005), 101–118 (109–110), who casts some doubt on the authenticity of *De Paenitentia homilia* 8 (PG 49, 335–344).

51 According to the *TLG*, ἐλεημοσύνη or one of its forms is mentioned at least twenty times in each of these works.

52 Margaret M. Mitchell, "Silver Chamber Pots and Other Goods Which Are Not Good: John Chrysostom's Discourse against Wealth and Possessions," in William Schweiker and Charles Mathewes, eds., *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 88–121 (116).

consistency of John's assertions concerning the power and benefits of almsgiving across both time and genres also suggests that these statements reflect his true sentiments to a strong degree. That said, I recognize that John had other unspoken motivations for promoting almsgiving, and I treat those in the second half of the book, particularly in chapter six.

## 8 Structure and Contents of the Book

This book argues that John Chrysostom provides a distinct and important perspective on the Christian practice of almsgiving in the late fourth and early fifth century. The argument unfolds over six chapters and is divided into two parts. Part 1 consists of two chapters. In chapter one, I provide a sketch of the practice of almsgiving in John's congregations in Antioch and Constantinople based on remarks in his homilies, as well as details provided by ancient church orders and other late antique Christians. Through these portrayals of the donors and recipients and by describing the frequency and quantity of giving, as well as the locations where giving occurred, I help the reader to envision how ancient Christians performed this salvific and transformative act. I also distinguish between the ideal scenario for almsgiving in John's mind and the actual practice in his congregations.

In chapter two, I demonstrate that John surpassed many of his predecessors and contemporaries in his teaching concerning almsgiving's efficacy and widespread applicability. He claims that there is no sin which alms cannot cleanse and even that almsgiving counterbalances *all* sin. He describes almsgiving as a medicine that can be applied to every wound. John consistently maintains that almsgiving is better than virginity and asserts that almsgiving can deliver one from a physical (presumably, pre-mature) death. In addition, he maintains that almsgiving is a sacramental and sacrificial act similar to the Eucharist with the almsgiver acting as the priest and the poor person serving as both the altar and sacrifice. Before presenting these daring claims, however, I discuss how John views almsgiving in the larger context of repentance and the problem of post-baptismal sin and how he ranks almsgiving compared to other acts thought capable of expunging sin.

Part 2 consists of chapters three–six and answers the question of why almsgiving occupied such an exalted position in John's homilies and writings. In chapter three, I draw attention to the far-reaching benefits of almsgiving that John expounds—both for the donor and for others. John spurs his worldlier donors to give by asserting that almsgiving will enable them to achieve undying notoriety among their human peers and act as a bond both for themselves

and for their children after they die. He appeals to his more spiritually mature donors by explaining that almsgiving not only erases the record of their sins but helps to eliminate their vices and nurture their virtues. Most importantly, it nurtures the virtues of mercy and love, and thus, makes them like God. In addition, almsgiving benefits the entire Christian body by decreasing the suffering of deceased Christians and catechumens and breaking down barriers between the rich and the poor. It even benefits society at large by drawing unbelievers who witness this generosity to the church.

Chapter four discusses how, in light of the absence of a strict penitential discipline in Antioch and Constantinople, John advocates almsgiving as an alternative form of penance for serious sins. The three “capital sins” of murder, adultery, and apostasy were dealt with by very public forms of ecclesiastical penance and/or long sentences in many regions during the fourth century. By contrast, the penitential discipline in Antioch was much more relaxed and private, and in Constantinople, Socrates and Sozomen recount that the institution was abolished in 391, prior to John’s assumption of the role of patriarch in 398. John, therefore, had relative freedom in deciding how to treat grave sins, but his expressed distaste for public confession and ostentatious forms of penance and his view that the duration of penance could vary based on the penitent’s contrition meant he needed other means for expiating these sins. Although known and criticized for his lenient dealing with sinners, John took sin very seriously and sought to undo its effects in his parishioners. As a physician of souls, he offered several remedies for healing the wounds of sin, but he only claimed that almsgiving was able to cleanse every and counterbalance all sin. I argue, therefore, in this chapter that John used almsgiving to atone for even the capital sins of murder, adultery, and apostasy.

Chapter five examines how John used almsgiving as a way to promote unity within his congregations between monks and married laypeople and between the rich and poor. Although the married laity thought that God did not hold them to the same standard of holiness as the monks and virgins, John repudiated this view and offered almsgiving as a shared opportunity and responsibility open to and expected of all. Furthermore, he maintained that almsgiving was a way for the married laity to imitate the monks in their communal way of life. John similarly warned the virgins and widows in his congregation that virginity was not enough to grant them entrance into heaven, but that they, too, would be judged based on how they treated Christ in the person of the poor. He taught that both the wealthy and impoverished could participate in almsgiving by using the resources and talents they had to contribute to the common good and that this concern for the other’s welfare and salvation would unite them into one soul.

Chapter six presents yet another reason for John's heavy emphasis on alms-giving—religious competition. Raising money for the poor and establishing charitable institutions was a way of increasing and maintaining one's authority. In Antioch, John would have encountered competition in this regard from the Jews, who had a reputation for caring for their own poor as well as strangers. He would also have faced competition from monks who did not work and were totally dependent on contributions from lay Christians. These monks would have threatened to divert funds away from the church and the involuntary poor to themselves. John would have competed for the title of "patron of the poor" with Isaac and his monks in Constantinople and with other Christian sects, such as the Anomoeans and Homoiousians, in both Antioch and Constantinople. Finally, the Greco-Roman ideal of philanthropy, known as *euergetism*, would have also posed a threat for John in both Antioch and Constantinople as the richer members of his congregations would be tempted to spend their money on public buildings and entertainment for their fellow citizens instead of relieving the suffering of the needy.

**PART 1**

*John's Views Concerning the  
Practice and Power of Almsgiving*

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## Introduction to Part 1

My purpose in Part 1 is to describe John's views concerning how one should practice almsgiving and his most daring assertions concerning the exalted status and potency of this act. In chapter one, I discuss John's prescriptions concerning the who, what, when, where, and how of almsgiving. I identify the donors and recipients, the types of alms, the locations where and occasions on which almsgiving occurred, and the method of almsgiving. In chapter two, I demonstrate the boldness of John's claims concerning almsgiving when compared to statements by other early and late antique Christians who also promoted almsgiving as a means of expiating post-baptismal sin. Although the idea of almsgiving as a means of dealing with post-baptismal sins was common among early and late antique Christians as well as Jews, John makes some particularly strong statements regarding almsgiving's sin-erasing power, for which parallels in the extant literature are not readily discernible, if they exist at all. Another surprising feature of John's teaching on almsgiving is that it ranks above other revered ascetic practices, namely virginity.

## Almsgiving in Theory and in Practice

In this chapter, I describe John's ideal of how almsgiving should work and paint a picture of the practice of almsgiving in John's congregations in Antioch and Constantinople as far as possible. I trace a network of late antique reflections on these questions in which I contextualize John's unique homiletic prescriptions. This literature includes church orders, especially those thought to be of Syrian provenance; ecclesiastical canons; hagiographical works; letters by other early Christians; and classical and contemporary works by secular authors. While John's statements regarding his congregants' practice of almsgiving cannot be taken at face value, certain statements of his carry more weight when they agree with descriptions of poverty and almsgiving by other late antique authors. At times, therefore, remarks from John's homilies can also shed light on how the members of his congregation practiced or did not practice almsgiving according to his directives.<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Who Is Expected to Give and What Constitutes Almsgiving?

Almsgiving, according to John, is a requirement for everyone—not just the wealthy. He often employs the example of the poor widow in Mark 12:41–44 and Luke 21:1–4, as well as the widow who fed Elijah in 1 Kings 17 to justify this obligation.<sup>2</sup> In *hom. in Mt.* 52.4, John mandates almsgiving for everyone and stresses that the amount given is not what matters, but the disposition with which the gift is made:

But whenever one is required to give alms, nothing else is needed, but only the will is necessary. And if you say that money is needed, and houses and clothes and shoes; read those words of Christ, which he spoke concerning the widow, and relieve yourself of this anxiety. For even if you are exceedingly poor, and among those who beg, if you throw in two mites, you have accomplished all. Even if you give just a barley cake, having only this, you have arrived at the end of the art.<sup>3</sup>

1 This chapter is heavily indebted to Richard Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*.

2 See Mayer, "John Chrysostom on Poverty," 89.

3 *hom. in Mt.* 52.4 (PG 58, 523).

John continually stresses the necessity of using one's gifts from God, whether material or otherwise, for the benefit and salvation of others. He rebukes the rich for not giving alms in proportion to their ability, but also insists that the poor have something significant to offer. Even if people do not have a single coin to give, they are still able to contribute something by extending mercy to their fellow humans. For John, therefore, the heart of almsgiving (ἐλεημοσύνη) is not about the quantity given, nor even the substance of what is given, but about having an attitude of generosity and contributing to the common good.

Drawing on the parable of the talents in Matt. 25:14–30, John addresses every member of his congregation, exempting no one from making a contribution: “For the talents here are each one’s ability, whether in the manner of protection, or in money, or in teaching, or in any way whatsoever. Let no person say, I have one talent and can do nothing, for you can be approved even with one.” He again brings in the example of the widow. Then, he concludes his argument with this statement: “For nothing is so pleasing to God, as to live for the common good. For this reason, God gave us speech and hands and feet and bodily strength and mind and judgment, that we might use all such things, both for our own salvation, and for the benefit of our neighbor.”<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, in *exp. in Ps.* 128:1, John explains that almsgiving is broader than just giving money to the poor. It can also include corporeal works of mercy, such as those mentioned in Matt. 25:31–46. One can even give alms through bearing suffering nobly. Speaking in the context of how to deal with post-baptismal sin, John instructs his audience: “Were you not strong enough after the bath to preserve your body as pure? You can make yourself pure through repentance, through money, through almsgiving.” He then anticipates the response of some of his congregants. “But, you do not have money?” There is no need to worry according to John. He tells his auditors that they can visit the sick or imprisoned, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, give two mites like the widow, or even mourn with those who are suffering. He then anticipates another possible response, which might provide some clue as to the economic and social diversity of his audience. “But you are completely destitute and poor, feeble in body and not able to walk?” Again, John has the solution. “Bear all these things with gratitude and you will reap a great reward.” Then, he reminds them of the story of Lazarus. Lazarus did not give anyone any money or visit the sick or imprisoned, and yet, “without these things, he snatched up the prize

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4 *hom. in Mt.* 78.3 (PG 58, 714–715).

for virtue for bearing everything nobly, for uttering no harsh word, despite seeing a cruel and savage man reveling and being esteemed while he himself was in such wretched circumstances.”<sup>5</sup>

Finally, John considers almsgiving to include converting wayward or Judaizing Christians. In fact, John considers this as a superior form of almsgiving because it has eternal, spiritual consequences. In a series of sermons preached against Judaizing Christians in 386–387, John urges his audience to rescue those of their number who are being lured to the synagogue and ceremonies of the Jews. In *Jud.* 6.7, John clearly intimates his concern for souls over bodies. “For this almsgiving is greater than the other, even greater than the profit of ten thousand talents .... The one who gives to the poor frees him from hunger, the one who corrects a Judaizing Christian destroys impiety .... The former frees a body from physical suffering, the latter snatches away a soul from Gehenna.”<sup>6</sup> Then, he addresses those in his audience of lesser means: “It is not possible in this case to blame poverty nor to put forward indigence as an excuse. The only cost is one of words; the only payment is that of speech. Therefore, let us not shrink from the task, but with all eagerness and goodwill, let us seek after our brothers.”<sup>7</sup>

John thus considers almsgiving to include not just giving money to the poor but using one’s gifts and talents to serve others; relieving the physical needs of the destitute by providing them with food, water, and clothing; consoling those who are suffering; bearing suffering meekly; and converting sinners or non-Christians. It is interesting that in these passages John, unlike other early Christians such as Clement of Alexandria and Ambrose, does not mention poor people praying for their rich donors.<sup>8</sup> Rather the role of the poor as well as the rich is to give alms. The poor may not be able to offer money; they may only be able to offer a service or a patient and meek attitude toward their suffering. This, according to John, counts as almsgiving. John also values prayer as an act

5 PG 55, 367–368.

6 *Jud.* 6.7 (PG 48, 915–916). See also *Jud.* 7.6 (PG 48, 925–926) where the people who have been taught plead for the salvation of their teacher at the final judgment.

7 PG 48, 916. In addition to this passage, see *hom. in 1 Cor.* 3.5 (PG 61, 29) where he ranks converting sinners over almsgiving and *hom. in Ac.* 25.3–4 (PG 60, 196) where he describes converting sinners as a type of alms greater than that given through money.

8 See Clement of Alexandria, *q.d.s.* 34 in O. Stählin, L. Früchtel, and U. Treu, eds. *Clemens Alexandrinus III*, GCS 17/2 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1970), 182–183; and Ambrose, *De officiis* 1.30.153 in M. Testard, ed. *Les Devoirs*, i.170. See also Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 179–182 in which these passages are quoted and discussed. For the idea of poor recipients praying for their rich donors, see Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 6–8 and 46–47.

of repentance, but he sees it as a practice distinct from almsgiving.<sup>9</sup> In any case, the poor are not simply saved because they are poor.<sup>10</sup> While John does claim it is easier to attain salvation if one is poor because poverty protects one from temptations like pride and exploitation of others, he still depicts poor people as morally free agents who must demonstrate virtue and its fruits in their lives.<sup>11</sup>

Although John considers almsgiving to encompass more than just giving money and constantly stresses to his audience that everyone is capable of giving alms, he is also insistent that the donor must possess the right disposition in order for the gift to have merit. He emphasizes that for almsgiving to have worth in God's sight, it must be accompanied by humility and love and must come from honest means. In *hom. in Jo.* 33.3, he remarks: "It is indeed not possible without this [humility] for one to be saved; though he fast, though he pray, though he give alms with detachment, all these things are loathsome, if this [humility] is not present."<sup>12</sup> In *hom. in 1Cor.* 32.4, as he is commenting on 1 Cor. 13:3, John echoes Paul's words that giving all of one's goods to the poor and even martyrdom are meaningless without love.<sup>13</sup> Finally, he teaches that no matter the size of the gift, it is abominable if it is given from unjust gains. He articulates this clearly in *hom. in Mt.* 85.3 where he is discussing how the Jews bought the potter's field with the money they had given Judas to betray Jesus instead of putting it into the temple treasury. He explains that when one gives alms through what he took from another, the theft is still not justified. John advises those in his audience who may earn their money through corrupt business practices or other unjust means that it is better not to give at all than

9 See, for example, *poenit.* 1–3 (PG 49, 277–299), where John lists five roads of repentance open to one after baptism: confession in the church, mourning for one's sins, humility, almsgiving, and prayer.

10 See further on this point, Becky Walker, "The Salvific Effects of Almsgiving and the Moral Status of the Poor in Talmudic Judaism and Late Antique Christianity," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 27 (2020): 1–21 (14–16).

11 See *hom. in Ac.* 13.4 (PG 60, 111) on how it is easier for the poor to be humble and moderate and *hom. in Ac.* 42.4 (PG 60, 302) on how the rich are more prone to sins such as vanity, envy, plotting, and slander. See also Jaclyn L. Maxwell's discussion of this topic in idem, *Simplicity and Humility in Late Antique Christian Thought: Elites and the Challenges of Apostolic Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 152–153. See Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 95–96, who points out that Cyprian also "accords to the poor a moral capacity and virtue of free will." See *ibid.*, 27–40 for a brief history of how the poor became associated with piety in Hellenistic Jewish and early Christian thought.

12 PG 59, 192. See also *hom. in Phil.* 1:18 (PG 51, 312) where John uses the same language of humility as the foundation of ascetical practices, such as fasting, prayer, and almsgiving as well as of philosophy and all virtue.

13 PG 61, 270.

to give from sources earned through exploiting others. “Why do you insult the Lord, offering him unclean things? It is better to allow [the poor man] to waste away with hunger than to feed him from these things. The former is cruel, the latter is both cruel and insolent. It is better to give nothing than to give the possessions of some people to others.”<sup>14</sup> According to John, almsgiving coming from unjust means is not almsgiving, but “savagery and inhumanity.”<sup>15</sup>

The *Didascalia*, a church order likely originating from Syria in the first part of the third century CE, provides a long list of types of sinners from whom the bishops should not accept offerings.<sup>16</sup> The *Apostolic Constitutions*, another church order of probable Syrian provenance partially based on the *Didascalia* and compiled between 375–400, closely follows the *Didascalia* in this regard. Some of the specific sinners whose offerings are to be refused include: “dishonest retailers (κάπηλοι),” robbers, fornicators, adulterers, those who oppress widows and orphans, those who treat their slaves cruelly, and any who have been excommunicated.<sup>17</sup> Yet, this same passage indicates that refusing such offerings may be difficult for the bishops based on their fear of not having enough funds to provide for the poor and widows.<sup>18</sup> It is not clear, therefore, how much this prescription translated into actual practice.<sup>19</sup> In any case, it appears that in Syria in the third and fourth centuries, the clergy were forbidden to accept alms from those whom they knew acquired the funds through dishonest means or exploitation of others. John does not mention this stipulation, perhaps because

14 PG 58, 761. See also *hom. in Jo.* 73.3 (PG 59, 398); 81.3 (PG 59, 441); and *hom. in Ac.* 22.3 (PG 60, 175).

15 See *hom. in Jo.* 73.3 (PG 59, 398).

16 *Didasc.* 18 (CSCO 407, 180–181). For the dating of the *Didascalia*, see Alistair Stewart-Sykes, ed. *The Didascalia Apostolorum: An English Version edited, introduced and annotated by Alistair Stewart-Sykes*, *Studia Traditionis Theologiae, Explorations in Early and Medieval Theology* 1 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2009), 22–55, esp. 54, who dates the final redaction to the first quarter of the fourth century, but dates the work of the “uniting redactor,” whom he claims is primarily responsible for the present version of the *Didascalia*, to the first quarter of the third century. See also Berthold Altaner and Alfred Stüiber, *Patrologie: Leben, Schriften, and Lehre der Kirchenväter* (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1966), 84 f.; O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte alterkirchlichen Literatur* 11 (Freiburg: Herder, 1913–1932), 304 ff.; Oscar D. Watkins, *A History of Penance: Being a Study of the Authorities*. Vol. 1, *For the whole Church to A. D. 450*. (New York: Longmans, 1920), 247–248; and P. Galtier, “La date de la Didascalie,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 42 (1947): 315–351.

17 See *Const. App.* 4.6 and 4.8 (SC 329, 178, 180, and 184). For the dating of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, see Altaner and Stüiber, 255 f., who date it to 375 CE and F.X. Funk, ed. *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* 1 (Paderborn: Schoeningh, 1905), XIX, who dates it to 400 CE.

18 *Const. App.* 8.1 (SC 328, 184).

19 See Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 38–40.

the clergy could not always determine the sources from which people gave, but he nonetheless emphasizes to his parishioners that God does know the means through which the offering was obtained and will not credit the act of almsgiving to those who make contributions from robbing others.<sup>20</sup> Nor, will God esteem the gifts of the proud or any alms given without love.

These passages demonstrate that John expected every member of his church to give according to his ability and through honest means, but they also shed light on what was given. For example, in the long quotation just mentioned from *hom. in Mt.* 52.4, John indicates that people considered alms to encompass clothing and shoes and houses.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the wealthier Christians in Antioch sometimes housed the poor in their own homes, sold some of their houses and gave the money to the poor, or even, donated houses to be used as hostels for the poor, sick, or strangers.<sup>22</sup> While some wealthier members from John's congregation may have gone so far as to donate their homes, money and food were likely the most popular forms of aid.<sup>23</sup> Although it appears that John's congregants sought to relieve themselves of the obligation to give alms through the fact that they could not contribute large gifts, John takes away this excuse by his unambiguous claim that even the gift of a barley loaf can win one commendation from Christ and that all people can give alms through serving others with their talents, relieving those enduring any type of suffering, and even, through bearing their own suffering meekly.

## 2 Quantity and Method of Almsgiving

John recommends to the individuals and families in his congregation that they keep a small chest in which to collect their alms at home.<sup>24</sup> He instructs them

20 See also, Augustine, *Enchir.* 7, 22 (CCSL 46, 62), where in arguing that lying is never justified, contends that no one would say that stealing from a rich man in order to give to a poor man is not a sin.

21 PG 58, 523.

22 See Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 105–106, where, based on Jerome's *Ep.* 77.6 (Jérôme Labouret, ed. *Saint Jérôme Lettres* [Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1953], vol. 4, 45–47) and *Ep.* 66.11 (Labouret, ed. *Lettres*, vol. 3, 177–178), he discusses the founding of such institutions by Fabiola and Pammachius, respectively.

23 See *hom. in Mt.* 66.3 (PG 58, 629); *hom. in Mt.* 85.4 (PG 58, 763); and *hom. in 1Cor.* 21.5 (PG 61, 176–177). See also Augustine, *Serm.* 208.2 (PL 38, 1045); and Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 100.

24 Peter Brown, *The Body & Society: Men, Women, & Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, twentieth anniversary edition with a new introduction (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 312–313, incorrectly identifies this as a practice John adopted from the Jews.



to keep it near their beds to prevent them from having bad dreams and also, near where they pray, so that having given alms first, their prayers will be more effective.

And let us make a box for the poor at home; and near the place where you stand praying, let it be placed there: and as often as you enter to pray, first deposit your alms, and then send up your prayer; and just as you would not choose to pray with unwashed hands, so neither do so without alms .... if you have this little poor-box, you have a weapon against the devil, you make wings for your prayer, you make your home holy, having food reserved for the king. And because of this, let the poor-box be placed beside the bed, and the night will not be disturbed by dreams.<sup>25</sup>

John goes on to suggest that whenever a craftsman or other businessperson sells one of his products, he should put a tenth of the profit in the box. He indicates that the Jews in biblical times gave this amount and that Christians should at least equal them in their generosity. John does stress that this is a recommendation, “neither as establishing a law, nor as forbidding more.”<sup>26</sup> It is not clear, however, whether this money was to be put into the regular church offering or to be given directly to the poor.<sup>27</sup> According to John in *hom. in Mt.* 66.3, the church at Antioch supported 3,000 widows and consecrated virgins along with prisoners, the sick, cripples, pilgrims and other travelers, the clergy, and people who came randomly on a daily basis for food and clothing.<sup>28</sup> The funds needed to support so many came from a variety of sources—imperial grants, church properties, and an offering by the congregation.<sup>29</sup> In this discourse, however, John indicates to his audience that the church’s revenues amount to one of the lowest incomes of the wealthy. He, thus, chides his wealthy listeners for being so tight-fisted when they have the power to eliminate the problem of poverty in their city. In this homily, John indicates that only 10 percent of the population of Antioch is among “the poor who have nothing at all (πενήτων τῶν οὐδὲν ὅλως ἔχόντων)” and 10 percent among “the rich (πλουσίων).” Although recent studies

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The context of John’s homily, however, makes it clear that tithing is the Jewish practice to which he is referring rather than having the poor-box by the bed.

25 *hom. in 1 Cor.* 43.4 (PG 61, 372–373).

26 PG 61, 373.

27 See “Locations for Almsgiving” below on pp. 16–18.

28 *hom. in Mt.* 66.3 (PG 58, 630).

29 See Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 35–67.

indicate that John's estimates are likely off considerably, with as many as 28 percent of Antioch's inhabitants living below subsistence level and an additional 40 percent living on the brink of poverty, John's point is that if the wealthiest 10 percent pooled together their resources, they could easily feed the poorest 10 percent.<sup>30</sup> He suggests that if "the wealthy and those after them [i.e. those right below the wealthiest 10 percent]"<sup>31</sup> were to divide up the poor among themselves, the provision of food and clothing for one poor person would fall to no less than fifty and maybe to as many as one-hundred of them. Although John appears to be speaking hypothetically in this context and probably does not expect the rich of his church personally to adopt the responsibility of providing for a beggar, his comments elsewhere make it clear that he thinks laypeople should be much more involved not only in contributing gifts for the poor, but in distributing them as well.

In *hom. in Mt.* 85.4, John complains against his congregation that because of their attachment to worldly things, the church's bishops and clergy have been forced to look after the indigent when their focus should have been on the care of souls:

But now a fear seized our fathers (when you were so mad after worldly things, and because of your gathering, and not scattering), so that the companies of the widows and orphans, and of the virgins, should not be destroyed by famine. For this reason, [the fathers] were compelled to supply these things [themselves]. For they did not wish to throw themselves into something so disgraceful, but they desired that your will should pro-

30 Steven J. Friesen, "Injustice or God's Will?: Early Explanations of Poverty," in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, edited by Susan Holman, Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 20–21. See also idem, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus," *JSNT* 26 (2004): 323–361 for a detailed explanation of how the author arrived at these figures. The study is based on cities in the Roman empire with 10,000 or more inhabitants during the first century CE. Although Friesen's study is based on an earlier period, these estimates still may be close to those in the fourth century as Mikhail Rostovtzeff has claimed that the economic conditions in fourth-century Antioch were very similar to those during the Hellenistic and early Roman period. See Mikhail Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 2nd ed. vol. 1 (Oxford, Clarendon, 1957), 263 and 266. See also, Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002), 14–15, who maintains that John's figures are realistic and closely mirror statistics from late-medieval European cities. He qualifies this, however, by explaining that many people were at risk of falling into "deep poverty" or utter destitution. He describes this class of people as living in "shallow poverty."

31 *hom. in Mt.* 66.3 (PG 58, 630).

vide an income for them, and that they should harvest their fruits from there, and that they should apply themselves to prayer only.<sup>32</sup>

John argues that because the laypeople did not contribute enough to provide for the needs of the poor, the clergy were forced to provide for these needs through other means, namely, properties. The management of these properties included “fields, houses, rent-houses, carriages, and mules and muleteers.”<sup>33</sup> The clergy, being forced to involve themselves in business affairs, a “disgraceful” situation in John’s eyes, were prevented from exercising their pastoral duties. John is not suggesting that the laypeople take over the management of these affairs, but that if his congregants would bestow some of their surplus on the poor, there would be no need for the church to possess these properties. Likely referring to the total number of Christians in Antioch, John puts forth the solution to this problem. “For I suppose that ... they that gather together here amounts to the number of one hundred thousand. If each one distributed one loaf of bread to some person of the poor, all would have plenty. But if one obol only, no one would be poor; and we should not endure so many reproaches and jests due to our concerns about the properties.”<sup>34</sup> Again, John’s main complaint against his congregants is their attachment to worldly possessions and lack of generosity. In this context, however, he plainly states that he hopes his words will bring about some real change. He is not engaging in merely wishful thinking but is urging the members of his flock to take seriously their obligation to feed the poor.

I do not say these things lightly, as if complaining, but so there may be some amendment and change .... But if you are not willing, behold the poor before your eyes; as many as it is possible for us to satisfy, we will not stop feeding. But those, whom it is not possible [for us to feed], we will reserve for you, that you may not hear those words on the fearful day, which will be spoken to the unmerciful and cruel: “You saw me hungry and did not feed me.”<sup>35</sup>

This passage not only indicates John’s irritation and censure of his congregation, but also shows that the church, even with its vast resources, could not take care of all the needy. As he does frequently in his admonitions to give alms, he

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32 *hom. in Mt.* 85.4 (PG 58, 762).

33 *Ibid.*

34 PG 58, 762–763.

35 PG 58, 762.

recalls the scene of the last judgment in Matt. 25:31–46 and reminds his listeners that in failing to take care of the poor, they are failing to care for Christ.<sup>36</sup>

Although John urges those under his direction to increase their giving and even encourages them to aid the poor directly, he indicates in *hom. in Mt.* 66, mentioned above, that even though he has often spoken of almsgiving and sees his congregation “sowing,” they are not sowing liberally. He fears that, consequently, they will “reap sparingly (2 Cor. 9:6).”<sup>37</sup> In *hom. in Mt.* 64 and *hom. in Eph.* 4,<sup>38</sup> John’s remarks indicate that most members of his congregation gave less than a tenth.<sup>39</sup> He recalls the example of the Jews in the Old Testament as well as of the Pharisees and shames his auditors by pointing out that the former gave several tithes. John estimates that adding together the separate tithes as well as all the other offerings, some Jews gave away up to half of their wealth.<sup>40</sup> Even so, John warns, the righteousness of the Christians must “be greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees” if they want to enter the kingdom of heaven. He wonders aloud how this can happen, given the current giving habits of his audience. “If then the one giving a half does no great thing, of what will he be worthy who does not even offer a tenth? With reason, he [Jesus] said, ‘Few there are who are saved.’”<sup>41</sup>

Richard Finn has pointed out that both Jerome and Augustine make similar comparisons with the Jews when trying to persuade those under their charge to increase their contributions. Jerome explains that the Old Testament laws regarding tithing have been superseded by Jesus’ command in Matt. 19:21 and Luke 18:22 to sell everything and give to the poor.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, Augustine upbraids his audience for not giving a thousandth while the Jews gave a tenth.<sup>43</sup> These statements, Finn argues, should not be taken as evidence of existent church laws requiring tithing, but as examples of how early Christians

36 See Rudolf Brändle, *Matth. 25, 31–46 im Werk des Johannes Chrysostomos: Ein Beitrag zur Auslegungsgeschichte und zur Erforschung der Ethik der griechischen Kirche um die Wende vom. 4 Zum 5. Jahrhundert* Beiträge Zur Geschichte der Biblischen Exegese 22 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1979), 18–38, who catalogs 170 direct and indirect quotations of this passage throughout John’s corpus.

37 PG 58, 630.

38 The provenance of this homily is uncertain, but the series on Ephesians has traditionally been assigned to Antioch. See Wendy Mayer, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom—Provenance: Reshaping the Foundations*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 273 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2005), 187 (hereafter, abbreviated as *Provenance*).

39 PG 58, 615; PG 62, 36.

40 *hom. in Mt.* 64.4 (PG 58, 615).

41 Ibid.

42 Jerome, *Mal.* 3.10 (CCSL 76A, 935), qtd. in Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 51.

43 Augustine, *Psal.* 146.17 (CCSL 40, 2135), qtd. in *ibid.*, 52.

sought to take over language from the Hebrew Bible and reinterpret it for their own purposes.<sup>44</sup> He further maintains that there is no evidence of compulsory tithing until Caesarius of Arles in the first half of the sixth century.<sup>45</sup> This, of course, does not exclude voluntary tithing, but simply means that most of John's congregants likely would not feel compelled to tithe, despite their pastor's exhortations. Lacking any specific injunctions to enforce this practice, it is also probable that John would not expect the majority of his members to heed his recommendation regarding the quantity of their giving.

Not only do John's words suggest that his congregants did not tithe, they also portray the people as making excuses for not giving to the poor when they were met by them on the streets. The wealthier members from John's church seem to want to avoid any direct contact with the poor, preferring their servants to distribute their alms for them or to give through the church. An additional motivation for giving during the assembly is so they might appear pious to others. John lists some of their excuses in *hom. in Mt.* 35:5 and reproaches for their cruelty those who offer these pretexts.

For I know many who have gone so far in brutality, as due to a little laziness, overlook those who are hungry, and say these words: "I have no servant with me now; we are far from home; there is no money-changer that I know well." Oh cruelty! .... Oh insolence! Oh pride! For, if it were necessary to walk ten stades, should you hesitate? Does it not even occur to you that in this way your reward is greater? For whenever you give, you receive a reward based only on what was given; when you yourself also go, the recompense for this is applied to you as well.<sup>46</sup>

Here, John encourages his members not only to give, but to give directly to people begging on the streets. Either he has heard their rejoinder before or he anticipates it. He presents his congregants as protesting that they are not giving directly to the poor so as to remain anonymous. "Someone says, 'And how should I not appear to be vain?'" John replies, "But, now, truly, this is another

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44 Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 49–56. Finn also argues that the language of "firstfruits" and "tithes" in the *Didascalia* and *Apostolic Constitutions* should be understood in the same manner and not as literally prescribing tithes or specifying any offerings apart from the one made during the Eucharist. See *Didasc.* 9 (CSCO 401, 112); and *Const. App.* 2.26 (SC 320, 236); and 4.8.4 (SC 329, 184). See also *Didasc.* 2.26 and 4.8 in the Latin version in Funk, 102 and 228.

45 Ibid., 52.

46 *hom. in Mt.* 35:5 (PG 57, 411–412).

kind of vanity to do this, being ashamed to be seen talking with a poor man.”<sup>47</sup> The people’s rejoinder makes sense when one reads Jerome’s description of the impure motives of the aristocratic woman who gave out alms to the poor herself at St. Peter’s Basilica. In Jerome’s estimation, the woman was giving to the poor directly “so as to be regarded as more pious.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, both the person who gave directly to the poor and the one who avoided direct giving could be judged by onlookers to be vain.

In *hom. in 1 Cor.* 21.5, John puts forth another excuse he has heard.<sup>49</sup> Apparently, some members of his congregation were critical of the clergy for not distributing their funds properly.<sup>50</sup> John does not say whether people were criticizing the priests for keeping too much of the money for themselves or giving it to undeserving recipients. He indicates that he does not wish to focus on these charges, although he labels these accusations a “grievous sin.” His point, rather, is that if his members suspect the priests, they should give their money directly to the poor.

For, what we say concerning almsgiving, we do not say that you should set before us, but that you should administer yourself. For if you bring your alms to me, perhaps you will be led astray by vanity, and often, you may also depart scandalized by suspecting something evil; but if you do all things by yourselves, you shall be delivered both from occasions to sin and from suspicion, and greater is your reward.<sup>51</sup>

Again, John accuses his congregants for not giving directly to the needy due to pride, but this time, it is out of a desire to be commended by their priest rather than out of fear of being seen with the poor. Earlier in this same homily, John also indicates that his members excuse themselves from giving to the

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47 Ibid.

48 Jerome, *Ep.* 22.32 (Labouret, ed. *Lettres*, vol. 1, 147).

49 This homily was certainly delivered in Antioch due to John’s comparison of the city in his time with its mention in Acts. See PG 61, 178.

50 Due to the vast amounts of money and resources handled by the clergy in major cities such as Antioch and Constantinople, it is not surprising that people would find fault with how they managed funds. When John was made bishop of Constantinople, he apparently found fault with how his predecessor, Nectarius, had allocated too much of the bishop’s funds to entertaining guests. See Palladius, *v. Chrys.* 5 (SC 341, 122). Ironically, John himself was accused of mismanaging church funds at the Synod of the Oak. See charges 3, 4, 16, and 17, preserved by Photius in Anne-Marie Malingrey, ed. *Palladios: Dialogue sur la vie de Jean Chrysostome*. Tome II. SC 342, 102 and 104.

51 PG 61, 179.

poor because the church has already provided them with some assistance. They protest, “He [the poor person] has ... the common allowance from the church (τὸ κοινὸν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας).”<sup>52</sup>

This tendency to avoid association with the poor may also be reflected in ecclesiastical canons regarding *apape* meals, events where wealthy Christians would invite the poor and clergy into their homes for a meal. Canon 11 of Gangra (343) forbids people from refusing to participate in such a meal or despising the host of such an event.<sup>53</sup> Canon 27 of Laodicea (c. 363) forbids the clergy from taking part of the meal home with them, possibly in order to avoid prolonged contact with the poor.<sup>54</sup> The *Apostolic Constitutions*, however, show that the bishop was expected to distribute the offerings that the people brought in as he was the one who knew those in need.<sup>55</sup> If this had been the practice in Antioch before John, people simply may have been accustomed to giving in this way and were not intentionally avoiding contact with the poor.

These various selections from John’s homilies show that while he desired for his members to involve themselves directly in caring for the poor, they preferred to give their money in church and to entrust the clergy with distributing it. Some disdained direct contact with beggars on the street, but others may simply have felt that distributing funds was the bishop’s duty. Certain members of John’s congregation may have hesitated to give because they felt that the church had sufficient resources to care for the poor without their putting themselves in a tight situation or that the problem of alleviating poverty was the work of large institutions, such as the church and empire. These excerpts also show that although John recommended tithing, he did not require it, much less expect that even his wealthier members would follow his advice.

### 3 Recipients of Almsgiving

While the regular offerings from the congregation helped to support the widows, consecrated virgins, orphans, clergy, sick, prisoners, travelers, and the poor who came on a daily basis to receive food and clothing, John expected the members of his church to provide additional funds to the poor directly, even to those

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Périclès-Pierre Joannou, *Discipline générale antique (Ive–Ixe s.)*, vol. 1/2: *Les Canons des Synodes Particuliers* (Grottaferrata, Rome: Tipografia Italo-Orientale “S. Nilo,” 1962), 93–94. See also Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 104.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 141. See also Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 104.

<sup>55</sup> *Const. App.* 3.4.2–3 (SC 329, 126).

who had already received aid from the church. These poor individuals may or may not have been Christians. Although some early Christians, such as Jerome, maintain that in giving alms, preference should be given to fellow Christians, John expresses bewilderment at this precept and stresses that true ἐλεημοσύνη is that which is directed toward the undeserving.<sup>56</sup> In *hom. in Heb.* 10.4, likely delivered in Antioch due to the reference of the monks or “holy ones (ἅγιοι)” “residing in the mountains (τοὺς ἐν ὄρεσι καθημένους),” John acknowledges Paul’s command that Christians should be the preferred recipients of mercy, but he still cannot bring himself to accept this practice.<sup>57</sup> He quotes Gal. 6:10, which reads: “Do good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of faith.”<sup>58</sup> Then, he explains his own judgment on the matter.

But I do not know from where this [tradition] has come, or from where this habit has prevailed. For he that searches out only the monks, and is willing to do for these alone, but on the other hand, investigates those others carefully, and says, “unless he is worthy, unless he is righteous, unless he performs signs, I will not stretch out a hand,” he has removed the greater part of mercy (ἐλεημοσύνη). And in time, he will destroy the thing itself. And yet, this is mercy (ἐλεημοσύνη), which is shown toward sinners, toward the guilty. And this is mercy (ἐλεημοσύνη), not having pity on those who have been virtuous, but having pity on those who have done wrong.<sup>59</sup>

From this passage, it appears that some among John’s flock only wished to give their money to monks or revered holy men. John, however, not only maintains that one should give to those who are not so righteous or even to those who are sinners, but that one should prefer to give to sinners because this is the definition of mercy. Here, John is employing ἐλεημοσύνη in both of its meanings as almsgiving and mercy.

In *hom. in Phil.* 1, John explains that if the recipient is truly in need and happens also to be a saint, that is ideal, but the important thing is that he is actually poor.<sup>60</sup> He cites Luke 14:12 in support of this reasoning by pointing out that the

56 See Jerome, *Ep.* 54.12 (Labouret, ed. *Lettres*, vol. 3, 35).

57 The series of homilies on Hebrews has traditionally been assigned to Constantinople, but see Pauline Allen and Wendy Mayer, “The thirty-four homilies on Hebrews,” 342; and Mayer, *Provenance*, 426–434, esp. 427.

58 See also *Const. App.* 7.2.7 (SC 336, 28), which urges this same practice by quoting Gal. 6:10.

59 PG 63, 88.

60 This is homily 2 in Field’s edition and is of uncertain provenance. The series has tradition-



reward is greater if one invites to his banquet those who cannot repay him. He also cites Matt. 25:31–46, underscoring that in this passage, Jesus said those were blessed who fed him when he was hungry and not those who simply fed him.

If there is someone among the leaders of the church, living in abundance and lacking nothing, even if he is a holy man, do not give, but prefer over him one that is in want, even though he is not so wonderful. And what in the world for? Because Christ also desires this, as when He says, “If you make a dinner or a breakfast, do not invite your friends, nor your relatives, but the crippled, the lame, the blind, those who are not able to pay you back.” (Luke 14:12). For it is necessary not simply to show such hospitality, but to show it to the hungry, to the thirsty, to the naked, to strangers, to those who from wealth have become poor. For he did not say simply, “I was fed,” but “I was hungry,” for, “You saw me hungry,” He says, “and fed me.” (Matt. 25:35).<sup>61</sup>

John goes on to point out that in the case of feeding Christ, “the justification was doubled” because he was both hungry and a saint. He is clear, however, that it is of no profit to provide for a saint who is not in need. “For if it is required simply to feed the hungry, much more is it required when the hungry person is also holy. If then he is holy, but not in need, do not give, for this is no profit.”<sup>62</sup> He concludes by saying that not only did Christ not command his followers to give to saints, but that whoever receives without being in need is not a saint.<sup>63</sup> From these two passages, one detects once again a difference between the ideal proposed by John and the reality lived out by his congregants.<sup>64</sup> Although John

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ally been assigned to Constantinople; however, see Allen and Mayer, “Chrysostom and the preaching of homilies in series: A re-examination of the fifteen homilies *In epistulam ad Philippenses* (CPG 4432),” 282, who argue that the homily is of likely Antiochene provenance based on the use of the term “ἄγιος” instead of the later “μοναχός.” Allen and Mayer refer to this as homily 1 in the article, following Montfaucon.

61 *hom. in Phil.* 2 in Frederick Field, ed. *Joannis Chrysostomi Interpretatio omnium epistolarum Paulinarum*, vol. 5, Bibliotheca Patrum (Oxford: Combe, 1855), 15–16 = *hom. in Phil.* 1 in PG 62, 188.

62 *Ibid.*

63 See also *hom. in 1 Thess.* 6.1 (PG 62, 429–430), where John seems to allude to the practice of monks begging for alms and condemns this activity because he thinks the monks should provide for themselves by working with their own hands. In this instance, John indicates that some in his congregation are loath to give to these monks and are as scandalized by this practice as himself.

64 That people gave alms to monks and other so-called “holy men” seems indisputable due to the well-attested practice of monks providing for the needy both from their own

stressed that one should give alms to whomever was in need, some members of his church preferred to give to those whom they judged worthy and even especially holy.<sup>65</sup>

It appears from John's *hom. in 1 Cor.* 21.5–6, however, that there was a group of poor to whom the members of his congregation did feel compelled to give. This group, in a sense, earned their pay by putting on a spectacle. They maimed their children or subjected their own bodies to freezing cold water, or according to John, even drove nails into their heads. John explains that they only went to such great lengths because they could not convince people to give through their supplications and tears. Their performances, however, were an effective means of collecting alms.

Some have even been compelled to maim their children, carrying them off at an untimely age in order to strike our insensibility .... These [beggars], often have appealed to us through pitiable gestures and words. Because they had no benefit, they have given up those supplications. Since then, they have surpassed our own miracle-workers, some chewing the skins of worn-out shoes, some driving sharp nails into their heads, others exposing their naked belly to the fixed waters beneath the ice, and others endur-

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stores and out of the donations of others. See John, *hom. in Mt.* 68.3 (PG 58, 644); 72.4 (PG 58, 671); Callinicus, *v. Hyp.* 34.1–6 (SC 177, 220); *v. Alexander* 27 (PO 6, 678); and Basil, *reg. fus.* 42 (PG 31, 1025a). See also Wendy Mayer, "Poverty and society in the world of John Chrysostom," in *Social and Political Life in Late Antiquity*, ed. W. Bowden, A. Gutteridge and C. Machado, *Late Antique Archaeology* 3.1, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 465–484; idem, "Poverty and generosity towards the poor in the time of John Chrysostom," in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan R. Holman, *Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History* 1, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 140–158 (141); and Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 172–173, 196. This practice was disputed, however, as it put the monks at risk of being charged with greed and exposed them to the temptation to hoard. See Finn's detailed description of the controversy surrounding this practice in *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 90–99.

- 65 Mayer, in "Poverty and generosity," 149–154, discusses people's tendency to give to self-sufficient ascetics as well as their reluctance to give to beggars or begging ascetics at length. Drawing on the work of Kavita Ayer, "Measuring Worth: Articulations of Poverty and Identity in the Late Roman Republic," (Ph.D. diss., Macquarie University, 2006), Mayer distinguishes between two types of poverty in late antique society. One was associated with the asceticism of the philosophers, did not require one to rely on others for sustenance, and was considered a respectable and even virtuous lifestyle. The other kind did force one to rely on the charity of others, and because it was considered to threaten the social order, it was associated with criminality.

ing different things more outrageous than these, in order to draw around them the ungodly spectators. And you, while these things are going on, stand around laughing and being amazed, making a spectacle of others' misfortunes, our common nature disgracing itself .... Next, you give him a large amount of money so that he may do these things more readily.<sup>66</sup>

Apparently, the laity protested that many of the poor only pretended to be suffering and were not really in need. This argument makes no sense to John because he cannot fathom why people would subject themselves to such humiliation for just a loaf of bread or a few coins if they were not really in need.

"But he pretends," says one, "this tremor and weakness." .... From the poor, from the pitiful, from him who is as good as dead, from him do you demand scrupulous accounts? .... If he does pretend, he does it out of necessity and want, on account of your cruelty and inhumanity, which, not being moved to pity, make such masks necessary. For who is so sorry and wretched as without being pressed by necessity, to behave so unseemly for one loaf of bread?<sup>67</sup>

John's point, here as elsewhere, is that one should give to those who ask without undue scrutiny of either the supplicant's financial situation or character. He goes on to urge his audience to stop this extravagant and inhumane behavior—both their own and that of the beggars who maim themselves and their children. His hearers can do this by communicating to the street performers that they will offer them nothing for their shows, but if the mendicants ask with propriety, they will contribute generously.<sup>68</sup>

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66 *hom. in 1 Cor.* 21.5–6 (PG 61, 177).

67 *hom. in 1 Cor.* 21.5 (PG 61, 176–177).

68 While John's descriptions of the lengths to which beggars would go in order to solicit alms appear to be unattested elsewhere, there are several ancient accounts in both pagan and Christian literature of beggars faking injuries. See, for example, Horace in the first century BCE, who mentions a beggar pretending to have a broken leg (*Ep.* 1.17.58–59); Martial in the first century CE, who describes shipwrecked sailors lying in the streets feigning injuries (*Epigrammaton* 12.57.12); and Ambrose of Milan who speaks of beggars dressing in shabby clothes and fabricating stories concerning their supposed misfortunes in order to take advantage of the generosity of people who are themselves poor (*Off.* 2.76 in M. Testard, ed., *Les Devoirs* ii [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984], 42–43). See also

These three passages illustrate John's emphasis on need as the main criterion for receiving alms, but that the members of his congregation preferred to give either to those whom they viewed as holy or to those who entertained them with their self-inflicted torture. They might also give to those whose plight was particularly lamentable, such as children who had been maimed by their parents. This last excerpt from *hom. in 1 Cor.* 21.5–6 also shows that members of John's church were generally distrustful of those who begged on the streets and habitually refused to give to them unless they put on some self-deprecating performance. These church-goers likely preferred to give alms to holy persons because they believed they would be assisted by their prayers or to donate to the church's general collection where they would be seen by the priest and their fellow Christians. Wealthier members of John's congregation likely still desired to perform acts of civic benefaction in order to receive recognition and praise from an even wider audience.<sup>69</sup>

#### 4 Frequency of and Locations for Almsgiving

In two of his homilies, John urges the members of his congregation to set aside money for the poor on the first day of the week, but he does not specify that they are to offer it at church or even give it to the poor this often. In fact, referencing 1 Cor. 16:2 in both instances, he instructs the members of his congregation to store up their funds little by little and when it adds up to a substantial amount, to present it at church. In *De Eleemosyna.* 3, John clarifies Paul's instructions in this way: "For this reason, [Paul] says, 'You reserve and put aside; and bit by bit whenever the little becomes a lot by small contributions, then bring it into the midst [of the assembly].' He did not say, 'gathering,' but, 'storing up (θησαυρίζων),' so you may learn that the expense itself is a treasure."<sup>70</sup> John explains Paul's words similarly in *hom. in 1 Cor.* 43.1. "He did not say, 'Let him bring it into the church,' so that they might be ashamed because of the small amount, 'but increasing the contribution little by little by collections, let him show it then when I am present, but until that time, place it near you,' he says, 'at home, and make your house a church, your poor-box a treasury (τὸ κιβώτιον γὰρ οὐ λαχαίον).'"<sup>71</sup>

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Gregg E. Gardner's discussion of these passages in idem, *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 170–171.

69 See *hom. in Jo.* 79.5 (PG 59, 432).

70 *Eleem.* 3 (PG 51, 266).

71 *hom. in 1 Cor.* 43.1 (PG 61, 368).

Richard Finn judges that by the third century, there was in some places a weekly collection at the *synaxis* as well as an alms-box, variously referred to as the “κορβάν/*corban*,” “*gazum*,” “γαζοφυλάκιον/ *gazophylacium*,” or “*quadriga* (chariot).” He explains that in some cases, however, the alms-box may have only been metaphorical, recalling the Gospel story of the widow who threw her two mites into the temple “treasury (γαζοφυλάκιον)” (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4) or Jesus’ command to store up “treasure (θησαυρός)” in heaven (Matt. 6:19–20; Luke 12:33–34).<sup>72</sup> The *Apostolic Constitutions* makes mention of a “κορβανᾶν,” where the people were to share at least “one, two, or five coins with the strangers,” where “strangers (ξένοις)” here is likely a reference to the poor.<sup>73</sup> It is not evident from the passage, however, if the κορβανᾶν was passed around or if the people were to deposit alms into it upon entering or leaving the church or at some other time during the assembly. In any case, it is likely that there was some regular offering to which the members of John’s congregation were expected to contribute, although it may have occurred less often than weekly. This money, combined with the funds from the church’s properties and imperial grants, would have gone to support not only the poor, but the 3,000 widows and consecrated virgins, prisoners, the sick, pilgrims, and clergy John mentions in *hom. in Mt.* 66.3.<sup>74</sup> This is a form of indirect giving, however, and as will be remembered, John encouraged giving to the poor directly. There were several locations where such direct giving might occur.

The passages from John’s homilies discussed above indicate that beggars regularly solicited Christians on the streets. It is likely, however, that poor people also went begging to people’s homes. In *hom. in Mt.* 85.4, John mentions giving “one loaf of bread” to the poor.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in *hom. in Mt.* 66.3, John reproaches his congregation for condemning the poor and being “so mean and scornful and reluctant” when giving “one loaf and a little money.”<sup>76</sup> While it is possible that one could give bread on the streets after just buying a loaf or purchasing a loaf on the spot for a poor person, it is also possible that one would provide a loaf of bread to a person who had come to her door. Jerome, for example, praises a widow’s husband, Nebridius, because his “doors were besieged by swarming crowds of the poor and weak” due to his renowned generosity in almsgiving.<sup>77</sup>

72 Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 42.

73 *Const. App.* 2.36.8 (sc 320, 260). See also Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 43–44.

74 PG 58, 630.

75 PG 58, 763.

76 PG 58, 629.

77 See Jerome, *Ep.* 79.2 (Labouret, ed. *Lettres*, vol. 4, 95). See also Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later*

From John's homilies, one also sees that it was customary for the poor to beg at the doors of the church as the worshipers entered. In *hom. in 2 Tim. 1*, John urges his congregants to give alms before they offer their prayers so that God will heed their requests and be merciful to them.<sup>78</sup> "For this reason, the poor have stood before the doors, so that no one may come in empty, but may enter with alms. You enter to receive mercy. First, show mercy .... Make God your debtor and then make your request."<sup>79</sup> John, here, as in several instances where he promotes almsgiving, alludes to Prov. 19:17, which reads: "He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him in full." John again refers to beggars standing at the doors of the church in *hom. in 1 Cor. 30.4*. He is commenting on 1 Cor. 12:12–20, Paul's discourse on the church as the body of Christ, in which he emphasizes how each member serves a vital function. After speaking of the place of the widows, virgins, married couples, and voluntary poor, John is careful not to forget those who would have been regarded by his congregation as the weakest members. "And why do I speak of virgins and widows and men without possessions? What is lowlier than those who beg? But yet, these fulfill the greatest need in the church, riveted to the doors of the sanctuary and offering its greatest ornament. And without these, there would be no perfecting the fullness of the church."<sup>80</sup> From this last passage, it appears that these poor people were members of the church and not simply beggars on the streets. They, too, however, may have been on the list of the "enrolled poor (τῶν ἐγγεγραμμένων πενήτων)" and received from the common church allowance mentioned earlier in *hom. in 1 Cor. 21*.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to begging on the streets, door to door, and at the doors of the church, it is likely that the poor in Antioch and Constantinople would solicit alms at the marketplaces and at the entrances to baths and palaces.<sup>82</sup> In *hom.*

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*Roman Empire*, 100. See also John Chrysostom, *hom. in 1 Cor. 13.5* (PG 61, 113), where John's mention of beggars "crying out from below (κάτωθεν βόωντων)" may be a reference to people begging at the street-level entrances of the homes of the wealthy.

78 The provenance of this homily is uncertain. Bonsdorff argues that the series was preached in Antioch, but Nägele contends that the series was delivered in Constantinople, partially based on comments from this homily. See Mayer, *Provenance*, 185–186 and 216–217.

79 John Chrysostom, *hom. in 2 Tim. 1* (PG 62, 606).

80 *hom. in 1 Cor. 30.4* (PG 61, 254).

81 See *hom. in 1 Cor. 21* (PG 61, 179), where John speaks of a "τῶν ἐγγεγραμμένων πενήτων." For mention of other such official lists of the poor supported from church funds, see Clement of Alexandria, *q.d.s.* 33 in Stählin, Früchtel, and Treu, GCS 17/2, 182; Augustine, *Ep. 20.2* in J. Divjak, ed. *Lettres 1–29, Œuvres de saint Augustin*, 46b (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1987), 294; and Gerontius, v. *Melaniae iunioris* 35 (SC 90, 194). See also Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 74–76.

82 See Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 99–103.

in *1 Cor.* 30, John argues, in response to the protests of some of his parishioners that the poor only came to church to receive alms, that if they wished, they could beg in the marketplace and in the lanes (κατὰ τὴν ἀγορὰν ... καὶ ἐν τοῖς στενωποῖς).<sup>83</sup> Libanius, in *Oratio* 7.1–2, describes “naked and half-naked” beggars standing at some entrance, presumably to the baths, in hopes of receiving an obol or a piece of bread, and Theodoret in *Historia Religiosa* 2.19, discusses the anchorite Julian of Saba healing a crippled man who was begging at the palace gates in Antioch.<sup>84</sup> It was also customary for donors to bestow alms at martyrs’ shrines and other pilgrimage sites. For instance, John mentions a shipwrecked pilgrim, who was “carrying alms for the poor” on his way to a martyr’s shrine in *De Statuis* 1.<sup>85</sup> Jerome recounts the story of a wealthy woman handing out coins in person at St. Peter’s Basilica, and the Syriac *Life of the Man of God* portrays the “man of God” as receiving alms at the church of Edessa, which was known to have a *martyrium*.<sup>86</sup>

Both from John’s homilies and other late antique literature, it appears that the frequency and locations for almsgiving could vary greatly. Christians would certainly have been expected to contribute to some common church fund, but the poorer members may not have been expected to contribute as often as the rich. The wealthier members of John’s congregations may have given to the church weekly and possibly bequeathed small alms to the poor daily. In addition to churches and martyrs’ shrines, almsgiving could occur wherever one found the poor—on the streets, in the marketplaces, at the baths, and even at the doors of one’s own home.

## 5 Conclusion

As can be seen from this brief survey of his homilies, John calls on all the members of his congregation to give alms to the poor—whether the “poor” are Christians or non-Christians, whether they are deserving or not, and whether one can be absolutely certain they are in need. Although John does not discourage making regular contributions to the church, he explicitly encourages

83 *hom. in 1 Cor.* 30 (PG 61, 254–255).

84 Libanius, *Or.* 7.1–2 (Richard Foerster, ed. Libanius, *Opera* (Leipzig: Lipsiae, 1903, repr. Hildesheim, 1963), 1.2, 373–374); and Theodoret, *h. rel.* 2.19 (SC 234, 238).

85 John Chrysostom, *stat.* 1 (PG 49, 29).

86 Jerome, *Ep.* 22.32 (Labouret, ed. *Lettres*, vol. 1, 147); *Life of the Man of God* in A. Amiaud, ed. *La Légende syriaque de saint Alexis l’homme de dieu*, Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études, 79 (Paris: Vieweg, 1889), 5.

direct giving to the poor. He does this in response to people's excuses that they do not give because they do not trust the priests and as a reproof to those who avoid direct contact with the poor for fear of being stigmatized. While John repeatedly emphasizes that it is not the quantity of the gift that matters, but the disposition of the giver, he suggests, pointing to the practice of the Jews during biblical times, contributing a tenth of one's income. John does not specify where, what, or how often one should give, but he does urge his congregants to lay aside money at least weekly and present it at church once it reaches a substantial amount.<sup>87</sup> He may have expected the wealthier members of his congregation to give weekly as he instructs his audience to give to the beggars standing at the doors of the church before they enter to offer their prayers.<sup>88</sup> Due to the apparent frequency with which one met beggars on the streets, it is not unreasonable to assume that he would expect those who regularly went out of their homes to give alms daily. In addition to contributing to the regular offering and giving to the poor at the doors of the church and on the streets, members of John's congregation might also give food, money, or clothing to beggars who knocked on their doors. While most of the members of his congregation likely only gave small coins or a loaf of bread, some of the wealthier members might have even donated houses, which could be turned into hostels for the sick or indigent.<sup>89</sup> John also directs his discourse to the poor at times, encouraging them to give something as well, whether this be a small amount of money, an act of mercy such as visiting the sick or imprisoned, pursuing those who have strayed from the church, or simply, accepting their suffering without complaining or bitterness.

This sampling from John's homilies indicates that the Christians under his spiritual care typically gave less than ten percent, preferred to give their money to those they judged to be particularly holy, and to use either the church or one of their servants as an intermediary when they did give to the poor. They might also be persuaded to donate to beggars on the streets who went so far as to inflict various tortures on their bodies in exchange for a few coins. Many people were suspicious of the poor and judged them as unworthy of their assistance. They did not view caring for the destitute as their personal responsibility, but as a function of large institutions, such as the government and church. Finally, large numbers of John's audience were themselves on the brink of poverty and feared giving away any surplus they might have lest they, too, found themselves on the streets.

87 *Eleem.* 3 (PG 51, 266); and *hom. in 1 Cor.* 43.1 (PG 61, 368).

88 See *hom. in 1 Cor.* 30.4 (PG 61, 254).

89 See *hom. in Mt.* 52.4 (PG 58, 523) and Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 105–106.



## John's Unparalleled Claims Regarding Almsgiving's Potency and Applicability

In this chapter, I focus on John's strongest claims regarding almsgiving. I argue that when compared to other late antique Christian authors, John goes farther in his statements regarding almsgiving's ability to atone for post-baptismal sin and his exaltation of almsgiving over virginity. He claims that there is no sin which alms cannot cleanse and even that almsgiving counterbalances *all* sin. He describes almsgiving as a medicine that can be applied to every wound. John consistently ranks almsgiving above virginity and asserts that almsgiving can deliver one from a physical (presumably, pre-mature) death. In addition, he maintains that almsgiving is a sacramental and sacrificial act similar to the Eucharist with the almsgiver acting as the priest and the poor person serving as both the altar and sacrifice. Before presenting these daring claims, however, I will first discuss how John views almsgiving in the larger context of repentance and the problem of post-baptismal sin and how he ranks almsgiving compared to other acts thought capable of dealing with sin.

### 1 Post-Baptismal Sin, Repentance, and Almsgiving

For one wishing to understand John's view of almsgiving, it is vital to see almsgiving's close association with repentance (μετανοία). In fact, although he never says this explicitly, the following could be a short definition of almsgiving for John: one of many modes of μετανοία capable of atoning for sins committed after baptism. John's understanding of almsgiving as a practice that effectively deals with post-baptismal sin is closely linked to his interpretation of Heb. 6:4–6. In *hom. in Heb.* 9, he quotes the passage in its entirety:

For it is impossible for those—once they have been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the coming age—if they should [then] fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they re-crucify the Son of God in themselves, and make a spectacle of him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PG 63, 78.

If taken at face-value, this passage in Hebrews seems to say that if one sins egregiously after baptism, there is no opportunity for repentance.<sup>2</sup> Some Christians in the third century, such as Tertullian, Origen, and Novatian, interpreted it to mean that while God might choose to forgive serious sins, such as murder, adultery, and apostasy, at the final judgment, the church had no authority to forgive such sins in this present life.<sup>3</sup> After the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, however, this attitude of rigorism ended, and the church considered no sins to be outside the scope of its authority to remit.<sup>4</sup> The standard interpretation of Heb. 6:4–6 also changed during the fourth century, although it is unclear whether Nicaea's decision to readmit all sinners to penance prompted this new interpretation or whether this new interpretation influenced Nicaea's decision.

John, along with Theodoret of Cyrus, Ps.-Ephrem, Ambrose, Pelagius, and Ps.-Augustine, interprets the verse to mean that one cannot be renewed by a second baptism but can be renewed through repentance.<sup>5</sup> John explains it in the following way:

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- 2 Other New Testament verses which seem to support this view include: Heb. 10:26; 1 John 5:16 ff.; and the Gospel passages on the sin against the Holy Spirit (Mt. 12:31–32; Mk. 3:28–30; Lk. 12:10). See Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 166–167, who argues that the original author meant that it was impossible to restore to repentance those who had apostatized. *The Shepherd of Hermas*, in an apparent allusion to Heb. 6:4–6, affirms the literal teaching of this passage, but explains that an angel of the Lord has revealed to him that for a limited period of time, there is a second repentance for those who have fallen after baptism. See *mand. 4.3.1–2, 6* in Molly Whittaker, ed. *Die Apostolischen Väter 1: Der Hirt des Hermas* (GCS 48, 2nd ed., 27–28).
  - 3 See Tertullian, *Pud.* 18.15 (SC 394, 250); Origen, *Jo.* 28.124–126 in *Origenes Werke IV. Commentarius in Iohannem* (GCS 10, 408); *comm. in Ro.* 5.7 (PG 14, 1037); or. 28.9–10 in *Origenes Werke II. Contra Celsum V–VIII, De Oratione* (GCS 3, 380–381); and Cyprian, *Ep.* 55.28 (CSEL 3.2, 646); and Ambrose, *Paen.* 2.2.6 (OOSA 17, 232), who comment on Novatian's and his sect's views. See, however, Origen, *Jo.* 20.89–90 in *Origenes Werke IV. Commentarius in Iohannem* (GCS 10, 341), where he understands the passage literally, but contradicts its teaching, maintaining that it is possible to repent again after committing serious sin. See also J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2003), 198–199; and Oscar D. Watkins, *A History of Penance: Being a Study of the Authorities*. Vol. 1, *For the whole Church to A. D. 450*. (New York: Longmans, 1920), 214.
  - 4 See Canon 13 of the Council of Nicaea in Norman Tanner, ed.; Original text by G. Alberigo et. al. in consultation with H. Jedin, *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 13. See also, Watkins, *A History of Penance*, vol. 1, 17.
  - 5 See Theodoret of Cyrus, *Heb.* 6 (PG 82, 717); Ps.-Ephrem, *Heb.* 6 in Mechatarist Fathers, eds. S. Ephraim Syri. *Commentarii in Epistolas D. Pauli* (Venice: Typographia Sancti Lazari, 1893), 214–215; Ambrose, *Paen.* 2.2.6–10 (OOSA 17, 232–236); Pelagius, *Exp. in Rom.* 6:9 in J. Armitage Robinson, ed. *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926; repr. 1967), 50–51; and Ps.-Augustine, *Vit. chr.* 13 (PL 40, 1043–1044). See

But that which he [Paul] says is this: Baptism is a cross. For, “our old man was crucified” (Rom. 6:6) .... Then, as it is not possible for Christ to be crucified a second time, for this is “to make a spectacle of him” .... Then, the one who is baptized a second time, crucifies Him again .... What then? Does it say there is no repentance (μετάνοια)? There is repentance, but there is no second baptism. But repentance there is, and it has great strength, and is able to set free from the burden of his sins, if he is willing, even the one who has been baptized much in sins, and to bring to safety him who is in danger, even the one who has arrived at the deepest depth of wickedness. (*hom. in Heb.* 9.3–4)<sup>6</sup>

According to John, to be baptized a second time would be to re-crucify Jesus since baptism is a participation in Jesus’ death. One does not re-crucify Jesus by sinning after baptism, but by being baptized a second time. For John and other early Christians, baptism is a very special grace because it wipes away and forgives all sins with virtually no effort required on the part of the sinner. Although John accords great power to repentance and declares above that it can save one who has committed many and great sins, he says in this same homily that it is not equal to the power of “the bath.” “For, to make people new is [the work] of the bath only (τοῦ λουτροῦ μόνον) .... But it is [the work] of repentance, when those who have become new are then made old by their sins, to set them free from their old age and make them new. To bring them to that former brightness, however, is not possible. For, there, the whole was grace (χάρις).”<sup>7</sup> When commenting on what “the heavenly gift” in Heb. 6:4 means, John explains that it means the forgiveness of sins (τῆς ἀφέσεως τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων). Then, he elaborates, “For this is [the work] of God alone to bestow grace, and the grace is a grace once for all.”<sup>8</sup> John believes that God’s grace is still present after baptism, but for sins to be forgiven after baptism also requires concrete acts of repentance and greater effort on the part of the sinner. God is still merciful to sinners after baptism, as is evidenced by God’s provision of the “medicine of repentance,” “but if we were always going to be saved by grace, we would never become good.”<sup>9</sup> John affirms God’s grace and mercy both before and after bap-

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also A.M. Vitti, “Rursum crucifigentes sibimetipsis Filium Dei et ostentui habentes’ (Hb 6, 6),” *VD* 22 (1942): 174–182, who traces this interpretation of a second baptism back to Origen in *comm. ser. in Mt.* 114 in *Origenes Werke XI. Commentarius in Matthaeum II* (GCS 38, 238–239).

<sup>6</sup> PG 63, 79–80.

<sup>7</sup> *hom. in Heb.* 9.3 (PG 63, 79).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *hom. in Heb.* 9.4 (PG 63, 80, lines 48–49); *hom. in Heb.* 9.3 (PG 63, 79, lines 49–51).

tism, but this mercy does not consist in God simply forgiving the sinner without also attempting to heal the harm the sinner has done to himself. John understood post-baptismal sin as having harmful effects on the soul that were not easily undone.

John proceeds in this homily by listing various forms of repentance, such as the confession of one's sins, humility, assiduous prayers along with tears, almsgiving, forgiving others, converting wandering brethren, being submissive to the priests, defending those who have been wronged, and bearing all things meekly.<sup>10</sup> Almsgiving is listed among a range of penitential acts, yet, John pauses to give it special emphasis.

There is need of much almsgiving (ἐλεημοσύνης): for this it is which especially gives strength to the medicine of repentance (φάρμακον τῆς μετανοίας). And as there is a medicine among the physicians' remedies which takes many herbs, but one is more important, so also in the case of repentance this is the principal herb (βοτάνη κυριωτέρα), indeed, it may be all [that is needed] (καὶ τὸ πᾶν αὕτη γένοιτο ἅν). (ibid.)<sup>11</sup>

John frequently speaks of repentance as a medicine and almsgiving, along with other penitential acts, as remedies for sin.<sup>12</sup> He also frequently exalts almsgiving over other ascetic practices and virtues. In *De Paenitentia* 1–3, John lists five “roads of repentance” open to one after baptism: confession in the church, mourning for one's sins, humility, almsgiving, and prayer. Almsgiving is listed fourth in the series, but John raises it above the other practices as he refers to it as the “queen of the virtues”<sup>13</sup> and later proclaims: “Therefore, you have almsgiving as a foremost and great repentance (πρώτην καὶ μεγάλην μετάνοιαν), one that can ransom you from the bondage of your sins.”<sup>14</sup> John, however, does occasionally rank other penitential acts and virtues above almsgiving, such as humility, love, bearing suffering meekly, and converting sinners,<sup>15</sup> and at other times, implies that all these virtues stand on equal ground.<sup>16</sup>

10 See also Origen, *hom. in Lev.* 2.4 (SC 286, 108–110), where he lists seven means of remitting post-baptismal sin: baptism, martyrdom, almsgiving, forgiving others, converting a sinner, love, and penance, wherein one confesses her sins to a priest.

11 PG 63, 81.

12 *diab.* 1.5 (SC 560, 148 and 150)/*diab.* 2.6 (PG 49, 263–264); *hom. in Mt.* 42.6 (PG 57, 615); *hom. in 1 Cor.* 23.6 (PG 61, 194); *hom., in 2. Cor.* 4.3 (PG 61, 196); *hom. in Heb.* 9.4–6 (PG 63, 78–81).

13 *poenit.* 3.1 (PG 49, 293).

14 *poenit.* 3.4 (PG 49, 297).

15 See *hom. in 1 Cor.* 23.4 (PG 61, 194–195).

16 See *hom. in Mt.* 15.1 (PG 57, 224–225) and *hom. in Jo.* 33.3 (PG 59, 192) where John speaks of

Although John's claims for almsgiving's effectiveness in dealing with any and all sin are extremely strong when compared to those of his contemporaries and predecessors, his understanding of almsgiving's power to remit sins, in general, was not uncommon. The idea is clearly attested in the Septuagint, and possibly, even in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>17</sup> Other early and late antique Christians adduced verses such as, Prov. 13:8; 16:6 (15:27a LXX); Dan. 4:27 (4:24 Theodotion); Sir. 3:30; Tob. 4:10–11; 12:8–9; Luke 11:41; and 16:6, in support of this teaching.

For example, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, in a passage urging its readers not to show partiality in almsgiving, quotes Dan. 4:27 (4:24 Theodotion) and Prov. 16:6 (15:27a LXX) among other scriptural passages as proof-texts for almsgiving's sin-redeeming value.

For the Lord says, "Give to everyone who asks of you (Luke 6:30)" It is clear that he means everyone who is in need, whether he be friend or foe, whether he be a relative or a stranger, whether he be single or married .... Through Daniel he says to the one in power: "Wherefore, O king, may my counsel please you, and ransom your sins through almsgiving and your iniquities by acts of mercy to the poor (Dan. 4:24 Theodotion)." And he says through Solomon: "By acts of mercy and faith, sins are purged (Prov. 15:27a LXX)."<sup>18</sup>

In the West, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine all freely cite these scriptural texts when trying to solicit alms from their respective audiences. In his treatise, *De opere et eleemosynis*, Cyprian invokes Dan. 4:27; Sir. 3:30; Tob. 12:8–9; Luke 11:41; 16:9, and many others to describe how almsgiving eradicates sin. He explains that just as the death of Jesus atones for sins committed prior to baptism, so almsgiving and other good works cleanse those sins committed after baptism.

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humility as a requisite virtue in order for almsgiving to be effective. See *hom. in 1 Cor.* 32.4 (PG 61, 270) where he discusses the necessity of love being present in order for almsgiving to possess merit but see also *hom. in Mt.* 46.4 (PG 58, 480–481) and 77.5 (PG 58, 709) where he lists almsgiving and love as separate but equal virtues. See *hom. in Mt.* 31.4 (PG 57, 375) where John elevates bearing suffering meekly over almsgiving. See *hom. in 1 Cor.* 3.5 (PG 61, 29) where he ranks converting sinners over almsgiving and *hom. in Ac.* 25.3–4 (PG 60, 196) and *Jud.* 6.7 (PG 48, 916) where he describes converting sinners and Judaizing Christians, respectively as a type of alms greater than that given through money.

17 See Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity*, 46–55, who maintains that the idea is present in the Aramaic of Daniel 4:27 (4:24 MT) and certainly in the Septuagint; and Anderson, "Redeem Your Sins," 42–45, 48–50, who argues that the idea is present in the Hebrew of Prov. 10:2 and 11:4.

18 *App. Const.* 3.4 (SC 329, 126 and 128).

The Holy Spirit speaks in the sacred Scriptures and says, "By almsgiving and faith sins are purged." Not assuredly, those sins which had previously been contracted, for those are purged by the blood and sanctification of Christ. Likewise, He [the Holy Spirit through Scripture] says again, "Just as water extinguishes fire, so almsgiving extinguishes sin (Sir. 3:30)." Here, also, it is shown and approved, that as in the bath of health-giving water the fire of Gehenna is extinguished, so by almsgiving and works of justice the flame of transgressions is laid to rest .... The Lord teaches this in the Gospel as well. For when the disciples were called out for eating and not first washing their hands, he responded and said, "He who made what is within, also made what is without. But truly, give alms and behold, all things are clean for you (Luke 11:40–41)."<sup>19</sup>

Here again, for Cyprian, the blood of Jesus accessed through the waters of baptism cleanses one of all sin committed up to that point. Almsgiving purges sins committed after baptism. John, therefore, aligns himself with this exegetical tradition that sees even in the New Testament and after the death of Jesus the necessity of human action in atoning for post-baptismal sins.<sup>20</sup> Neither John nor any other early Christian of whom I am aware says that the death of Jesus only atones for sins committed prior to baptism. On the contrary, Basil of Caesarea explicitly states that humans cannot atone for their sins apart from the blood of Christ.<sup>21</sup> Just as believers must be baptized, however, in order to apply the effects of Jesus' death to their sins, so also, to atone for sins after baptism, they must perform acts of repentance in response to what Jesus has done. Jesus' death alone does not remit or cancel these sins.

The scriptures referenced in the above passages also supply John with several metaphors to speak of how almsgiving deals with sin. Almsgiving cleanses the stain of sin, quenches the fire of sin, and pays the debt of sin. In addition to these metaphors taken from Scripture, John also employs the metaphors of sin as a sickness or disease that almsgiving heals, a burden that almsgiving lightens, and a commercial weight that almsgiving counterbalances. It is important to pay attention to this variety of metaphors as they inform our understanding of biblical and early Christian hamartiology and soteriology. Roman Garrison, Gary Anderson, and Peter Brown have articulately described the biblical and early Christian concept of sin as a debt and have aptly labelled the idea of alms-

19 Cyprian, *Eleem.* 2 (CCL 3a, 55–56).

20 See also Ambrose, *Hel.* 20, 76 (CSEL 32.2, 458).

21 Basil of Caesarea, *reg. br.* 271 (PL 31, 1269). See also the following section where this passage is discussed in more detail.

giving paying the debt of sin as “redemptive almsgiving.”<sup>22</sup> Certainly, Second Temple Jews and Christians through at least the fifth century CE did conceive of sin as a debt and of almsgiving as paying this debt, and thus, saving them from the eternal punishment due to sin. An exclusive focus on this financial imagery, however, has often led to the false impression that some Jews and early Christians saw almsgiving as something that simply paid the debt of sin without effecting any change in the heart or soul of the donor.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, almsgiving also effectively treated the more immediate consequences of sin, such as attachment to sin, a distorted view of reality, and a weakened will.<sup>24</sup>

One of John’s favorite metaphors is almsgiving as a remedy for the wound or disease of sin, describing almsgiving or mercy (ἐλεημοσύνη) as a drug or remedy (φάρμακον) for sin at least 18 times.<sup>25</sup> In addition, he uses cleansing and rejuvenating metaphors to communicate how almsgiving reverses the staining and aging effects of sin on the soul.<sup>26</sup> Taken together, these metaphors suggest that John viewed sin primarily through its harmful effects on the soul rather than as a debt that had to be repaid. Although the main point of this chapter is to demonstrate that John surpassed his predecessors and contemporaries in the statements he made concerning almsgiving’s sin-atoning power and superiority over other ascetic practices, I will also highlight passages that reveal specifically how John saw almsgiving as acting on sin and reversing its effects.

22 See Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity*, 10; Anderson, “Redeem Your Sins by the Giving of Alms,” 39–69; and Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul*, 96–98. For other works in which Anderson and Brown discuss redemptive almsgiving, see footnote 8 in the introduction.

23 David J. Downs, *Alms*, 68–69, has also called attention to the great variety of metaphors both scriptural and early Christian authors used to describe both sin and almsgiving. He has likewise criticized Anderson for “his proclivity to force texts into his economic metaphor for sin and his failure to account for the diversity of metaphors used in early Jewish and Christian literature to describe sin and its effects (69).” In the immediate context, Downs is discussing the meaning of the word ἀποκαθαρίζω in Tob. 12:9, which Anderson had earlier argued meant “to pay off the debt” of sin. (See, for example, Anderson, “How Does Almsgiving Purge Sins?,” 10.) Downs contends against Anderson that ἀποκαθαρίζω should be understood according to its usual meaning, “to cleanse” or “to purge,” since sin is portrayed as an impurity or defilement elsewhere in the book of Tobit.

24 These ideas are associated with the inculcation of virtue and deification and will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

25 John speaks of sin as a wound (τραῦμα) at least 38 times and of sin as a disease or sickness (νόσος) 23 times.

26 See especially *hom. in Jo.* 73.2–3 (PG 59, 398) and *hom. in Jo.* 81.3 (PG 59, 442).

## 2 Almsgiving Cleanses Every Sin and Counterbalances All Sin

One metaphor that John frequently employs to describe how almsgiving deals with sin is that of cleansing the stain of sin. In *hom. in Ac.* 25.3, John claims that there is “no sin, which alms cannot cleanse, none, which alms cannot quench. All sin stands below this.” Almsgiving is a “medicine adapted to every wound (φάρμακὸν ἐστὶ πρὸς πᾶν τραῦμα ἐπιτήδειον).”<sup>27</sup> His remark that there is no sin that alms cannot cleanse only echoes Tob. 12:9, which states that almsgiving cleanses every sin (ἀποκαθαριεῖ πάσαν ἁμαρτίαν),<sup>28</sup> but while other early Christians invoke this same scriptural passage to explain how almsgiving can cleanse or purge post-baptismal sin, they do not go so far as to claim that almsgiving can cleanse *every* sin.<sup>29</sup>

In *De opere et eleemosynis* 5, Cyprian references Tob. 12:9, but his Latin version omits the word “all (*omni*),” and reads instead: “For almsgiving delivers from death, and the same is that which purges sins and enables one to find mercy and eternal life.”<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, in this context, Cyprian asserts: “Prayer is good with fasting and almsgiving because almsgiving delivers from death, and the same purges sins.”<sup>31</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that in referencing

27 PG 60, 196.

28 The entire verse in the Septuagint reads: “For almsgiving delivers from death, and it cleanses every sin. Those who do alms and righteousness will be filled with life (ἐλεημοσύνη γὰρ ἐκ θανάτου ῥύεται, καὶ αὐτὴ ἀποκαθαριεῖ πάσαν ἁμαρτίαν. οἱ ποιοῦντες ἐλεημοσύνας καὶ δικαιοσύνας πλησθήσονται ζωῆς).” See Alfred Rahlfs, ed. *Septuaginta: id est Vetus Testamentum Graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, editio altera (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

29 See Cyprian, *Eleem.* 5 (CCSL 3a, 58); and Ambrose, *Hel.* 20.76 (CSEL 32/2, 458). See also Cyprian, *Ad Quirin.* 3.1 (CSEL 3/1, 109); *Dom. orat.* 32 (CCSL 3A, 110); Lactantius, *D. i.* 6.13 in Eberhard Heck and Antonie Wlosok, eds., *Lactantius Divinarum Institutionum Libri Septem*. vol. 3 (New York: de Gruyter, 20009), 587–588; Ambrose, *Psal.* 118, 14.7 (CSEL 62, 301); 16.14 (CSEL 62, 359); *Ep.* 14.16 in *Extra Collectionem* (OOSA 21, 270); *Luc.* 5.60 (SC 45, 205); 7.101 (SC 52, 44); Didymus, *Zech.* 2, 119 (SC 83, 476); *fr. Ps.* 579 in Ekkehard Mühlentberg, ed., *Psalmenkommentare aus der Katenenüberlieferung*, Bd. 2 (Berlin, De Gruyter, 1977), 15; Ps-Didymus, *Trin.* 2.27 (PG 39, 765); and 2 *Clem.* 16.4 in Karl Bihlmeyer and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, eds. *Die Apostolischen Väter* ser. 2, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1970), 78–79.

30 The Old Latin text reads: *quoniam elemosyna a morte liberat et ipsa est quae purgat peccata et facit inuenire misericordiam et vitam aeternam*. See card index system of Vetus Latina Database, available online through Brepols. For Latin Vulgate, see Robert Weber and Roger Gryson, eds., *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007). See also Mary Joseph Aloysius Buck, *S. Ambrosii De Helia et Ieiunio: A Commentary with an Introduction and Translation* (Washington, D.C., 1929), 206, note 4, where she comments on Ambrose's text of Tob. 12:9.

31 Cyprian, *Eleem.* 5 (CCSL 3a, 58).



this verse, his claim falls short of John's. In this same work, however, Cyprian also references Tob. 4:11, which reads very similarly to Tob. 12:9. In this instance, rather than omitting words, both the Old Latin and Vulgate add the phrase, "*ab omni peccato*." The verse in the Latin states: "For, almsgiving delivers from all sin and from death and will not permit the soul to go into darkness," while the corresponding verse in the Septuagint (4:10) reads: "Because almsgiving delivers from death and from going into the darkness."<sup>32</sup> In *Eleem.* 20, Cyprian cites this verse, but omits the "*ab omni peccato*." He says simply: "Because almsgiving delivers from death and does not permit the soul to go into darkness."<sup>33</sup>

Ambrose likewise references both Tob. 4:11 and 12:9, but never quotes the complete phrase, "*ab omni peccato*."<sup>34</sup> In *De Helia et ieiunio* 20, 76, he simply says: "Almsgiving liberates from sin (*elemosyna a peccato liberat*)."<sup>35</sup> Earlier in the same work, he states that fasting and almsgiving liberate from sin, but he again only says "sin," rather than "every (*omni*) sin."<sup>36</sup>

John also employs Luke 11:41 when extolling the cleansing and healing power of almsgiving. In *hom. in Jo.* 81.3, he cites the verse as he is discussing the medicinal effects of almsgiving on the soul. "It [the soul] receives many wounds each day, by being lustful, angry, apathetic, abusive, vindictive, envious. It is, necessary, therefore, to prepare remedies for it, and no small remedy is that of almsgiving, which can be placed on all wounds. For, 'Give alms,' it says, 'and all

32 The Old Latin and Vulgate texts of Tob. 4:11 read: "*quoniam elemosyna ab omni peccato et a morte liberat et non patietur animam ire in tenebras*." See card index system of Vetus Latina Database, available online through Brepols, and Weber and Gryson, eds., *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, 5th ed. See also Buck, *S. Ambrosii De Helia et Ieiunio*, 126–127, note 11, where she comments on Ambrose's text of Tob. 4:11. The Septuagint text of Tob. 4:10 reads: "διότι ἐλεημοσύνη ἐκ θανάτου ῥύεται καὶ οὐκ ἐὰν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὸ σκότος." See Rahlfs, ed. *Septuaginta*, 2006.

33 Cyprian, *Eleem.* 20 (CCSL 3a, 68).

34 Unfortunately, in Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*, trans. M. Ní Riain (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2001), 137, the translation of *Luc.* 5:60 reads: "And one who is compassionate purifies his heart—and what does it mean to purify the heart if not to wash out every stain of sin? For, 'alms deliver from all sin' (Tb 4:11)." In SC 45, 205, CSEL 32/4, 205, and PL 15, 1652, however, the Latin text reads: "... qui miseretur, cor suum mundat. Quid est enim mundare animum, nisi sordem mortis abolere? Elemosyna enim a morte liberat (Tob. 4:11)." Thus, the reference to Tob. 4:11 should read: "For almsgiving delivers from death," rather than "alms deliver from all sin." Likewise, the preceding text should read: "One who is compassionate purifies his heart. What does it mean to purify the soul, except to wipe out the stain of death?"

35 Ambrose, *Hel.* 20.76 (CSEL 32/2, 458). See also *Psal.* 118, 8.41 (CSEL 62, 176).

36 Ambrose, *Hel.* 4.9 (CSEL 32/2, 418). See also, *Ep.* 3.14 (CSEL 82/3, 243).

things will be clean for you (Luke 11:41).'<sup>37</sup> John, therefore, understands "things" in this verse to refer to sins. Therefore, it follows that he would understand "all things" to refer to "all sins," including even the most serious sins such as murder, adultery, and apostasy. This passage is also a good illustration of how John sees sin as affecting the soul. Lust, anger, envy, apathy, and other sins wound the soul, but almsgiving can be applied as a poultice or soothing ointment to all these wounds.

Other early Christians also reference Luke 11:41 in support of almsgiving's power to cleanse sins committed after baptism, but again, none claim with John that it cleanses all sins.<sup>38</sup> Basil of Caesarea, in his *Regula brevius tractatae*, answers the question of whether, based on Jesus' words in Luke 11:41, one can be purified of all sins through almsgiving. Basil responds by saying, "It concerns all those ways in which we sin through grasping and avarice." He then brings in the example of the tax collector Zacchaeus in Luke 19:8 who restored what he had extorted fourfold and explains that people are purified in this way—"when it is possible to undo such sins and to repay many times over."<sup>39</sup> He then adds that the blood of Christ and the mercy of God must precede this act and that the person must be truly repentant in order for the almsgiving to be effective.<sup>40</sup> Basil does not deny that almsgiving can purify one of sin because to do so would be to deny the exegetical tradition surrounding this verse as well as certain scriptures in the Septuagint, but as he rarely uses this argument to persuade his congregants to give alms, he seems much less comfortable with the teaching than John. Here, when confronted with the teaching directly, he feels the need to qualify it.

Augustine clearly maintains in *De fide et operibus* 19.34 that almsgiving cannot atone for certain serious sins and that his contemporaries agree with him in this regard.

37 *hom. in Jo.* 81.3 (PG 59, 442). See also *hom. in Mt.* 50.4 (PG 58, 510), for another instance of where John interprets Luke 11:41 as applying to almsgiving.

38 See Justin Martyr, *dial.* 14.2 in Miroslav Marcovich, ed. *Iustini Martyris dialogus cum Tryphone* (New York: de Gruyter, 1997), 92–93; Cyprian, *Ad. Quirin.* 3.1 (CSEL 3/1, 113); *Eleem.* 2 (CCL 3A, 56); Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.27.2, 3, 6 (SC 456, 346 and 350); Origen, *hom. in Lev.* 2.4 (SC 286, 108); Ambrose, *Nab.* 2.8 (CSEL 32/2, 473); *Luc.* 7.101 (SC 52, 44); Ambrosiaster, *Comm. in ep. Paul* (CSEL 81/3, 162); and Procopius of Gaza, *Comm. in Deut.* 24.7 (PG 87/1, 937).

39 Basil of Caesarea, *reg. br.* 271 (PL 31, 1269).

40 As Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 179, note 10, remarks, Basil cites only a few of the biblical texts that teach redemptive almsgiving and even rarely cites these few. Basil's reluctance to grant that almsgiving cleanses all sins is likely due to the strict penitential system which existed in Cappadocia in the fourth century, whereby the capital sins were routinely "cleansed" by the administration of long and public penances.

There are others who are of the opinion that sin is easily compensated for by almsgiving. Nevertheless, these do not doubt that there are three “deadly (*mortifera*)” sins for which they should be punished and excommunicated until they are healed through a humbler penance: impurity, idolatry, and homicide. But now is not the time to examine this opinion as to whether it should be corrected or approved.<sup>41</sup>

Augustine, therefore, does not seem to grant almsgiving as much power to atone for and heal sins as some other Christians during his day, but he confidently asserts that even those who are more lenient in this regard do not claim that almsgiving can atone for the sins of adultery, apostasy, and murder.<sup>42</sup> This passage makes clear that Augustine and others think much more humbling acts are required to heal these sins.

Closely related to John’s claim that there is no sin that alms cannot cleanse is his assertion that almsgiving counterbalances all sin. This latter claim, however, has no clear scriptural roots. In *poenit.* 3.1, John personifies almsgiving as the sinner’s advocate before God and envisions sin as a debt that almsgiving remits. He also sees sin as a commercial weight that almsgiving counterbalances or outweighs. Again, John uses a combination of metaphors in order to communicate the extent of almsgiving’s power.

Even if you have many sins, but have almsgiving as your advocate, do not be afraid. For no power opposes her. She demands back the debt. Look! She is carrying the bond (χειρόγραφον; Col. 2:14) away in her hands. For it is the Lord’s voice that says, ‘As you have done it to one of the least of these, you did it to me (Matt. 25:40).’ Therefore, regardless of how many other sins you have, your almsgiving counterbalances (βαρεῖ) them all.<sup>43</sup>

In this passage, John assures his congregation that regardless of the number or weight of their sins, almsgiving counterbalances them all. In other words, John’s words here seem to imply that no matter how many sins a person has commit-

41 Augustine, *Fid. et op.* 19.34 (CSEL 41, 79–80).

42 See also *Enchir.* 70 (CCL 46, 87), where he does maintain that alms should be given “as a propitiation to God for past sins (*de peccatis praeteritis est propitiandus deus*),” but cautions one against thinking that he can commit “unspeakable crimes (*infanda crimina*)” daily and redeem them with daily almsgiving.

43 PG 49, 293.

ted during his or her lifetime, all of them may be expunged through almsgiving. Also, as he does not make any distinction here between serious and less serious sins, his words in this passage could be taken to mean that even if a person commits murder or apostasy multiple times, the sinner can still tilt the scales in his favor through almsgiving.

John's reasoning here can be better understood by examining his words in *Ad Theodorum lapsum* 1. The work is a treatise that John most likely wrote in 387, but it is written in the form of a letter to a certain Theodore (possibly, to Theodore of Mopsuestia), a former member of John's ascetic circle.<sup>44</sup> In it, John pleads with his friend to renounce his plans for marriage and return to his higher spiritual calling. John is insistent throughout the letter that repentance can wipe away every sin, even Judas' sin of betraying Christ, but only if it is performed during this life.<sup>45</sup> According to John, once people die, their eternal fate is determined by whether their good deeds performed on earth outweigh their bad. Although there are only two destinations, paradise or the torments of hell, all things are not equal in each of these abodes. A person who has done some good deeds will not suffer as much as one who has done no good deeds. Similarly, in paradise, the rewards vary based on the degree of virtue one has attained. John does not explicitly state that good deeds weigh more than bad deeds, but he does stress that every good deed matters and that God is eager to reward even the smallest act of kindness, such as offering a cup of cold water to one of his disciples (Matt. 10:42; Mark 9:41).<sup>46</sup>

Although considerably later, a close parallel to John's claim is found in the seventh century *Life of John the Almsgiver*. The biographer, Leontius of Neapolis, tells a story of a tight-fisted customs official in Carthage. A beggar bets his friends that he can secure some kind of alms from him. He does indeed secure a loaf of bread with which the customs official hit him over the head. Nevertheless, he triumphantly presents the loaf of bread to his friends as proof of his success. That night, the customs official has a dream about the afterlife. In it, his deeds are being weighed on a scale, and the balance is tilting toward eternal damnation, but then, angels throw on the small loaf of bread which he involuntarily gave to the beggar. The bread is just enough to counterbalance the scales, and the official realizes how significant almsgiving is to God. The dream

44 For the dating of this work, see Martin Illert, *Johannes Chrysostomus und das antiochenisch-syrische Mönchtum: Studien zu Theologie, Rhetorik und Kirchenpolitik im antiochenischen Schrifttum des Johannes Chrysostomus* (Zürich: Pano Verlag, 2000), 6–11 and 23.

45 *Thdr.* 1.9 (SC 117, 122–124).

46 *Thdr.* 1.21–22 (SC 117, 212–216).

is enough to convert the official, prompting him to sell all his possessions and mercifully give to the poor.<sup>47</sup> This is closely akin to the idea John is espousing in *poenit.* 3.1, but the legend post-dates him considerably.

Among John's predecessors, the second-century author of *2 Clement* may most closely parallel this claim of John's. In *2 Clem.* 16.4, the author associates 1 Peter 4:8 ("Love covers a multitude of sins") with almsgiving, using the metaphor of sin as a burden. He states, "Almsgiving is good as repentance from sin. Fasting is better than prayer, and almsgiving is better than both. 'Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8),' and prayer from a good conscience delivers from death. Blessed is everyone who is found perfect in these things. For, almsgiving lightens the burden of sin."<sup>48</sup> Although this passage suggests that love, manifested through almsgiving, covers a multitude of sins, it still does not say that almsgiving covers *all* sins or counterbalances all sin. Up until his time, therefore, John appears to be unrivalled in his use of such all-inclusive language concerning almsgiving's capacity to offset all sin.

### 3 Almsgiving Is a Medicine Adapted to Every Wound

In the passage from *hom. in Ac.* 25.3, John claims not only that almsgiving cleanses every sin, but also that it is a medicine adapted to every wound. According to John, almsgiving not only cleanses or erases the record of every sin; it heals every sin. In this case, however, John is not simply employing another metaphor. Several scholars have recently discussed how John and other early and late antique Christians, influenced by ancient Greek philosophical therapy, saw sin as an actual disease of the soul.<sup>49</sup> In this view, sin was conceived as an imbalance in the soul caused by disordered passions; right reason or the proper mindset corrected this disorder.<sup>50</sup> Not only did almsgiving

47 Leontius of Neapolis, *v. Jo. Eleem.* 20–21 in André-Jean Festugière and Lennart Rydén, eds. *Léontios de Néapolis: Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre* (Paris: Geuthner, 1974), 368–369.

48 *2 Clem.* 16.4 in Bihlmeyer and Schneemelcher, eds. *Die Apostolischen Väter* ser. 2, vol. 1, pt. 1, 78–79.

49 For the idea that sin was a genuine sickness of the soul and no mere metaphor, see Wendy Mayer, "The Persistence in Late Antiquity of Medico-Philosophical Psychic Therapy," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 8 (2015): 337–351 (340, n. 16); and L. Michael White, "Moral Pathology: Passions, Progress, and Protrepic in Clement of Alexandria," in *Passions and Moral Progress in Greco-Roman Thought*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald (London: Routledge, 2007) 284–321 (292).

50 See James Cook, "'Hear and Shudder!': John Chrysostom's Therapy of the Soul," in *Revisiting John Chrysostom: New Approaches, New Perspectives*, ed. Chris L. de Wet and Wendy

heal opposing vices such as greed and theft, but all vices in that it restored peace and power of mind to the soul.<sup>51</sup> As John intimates in *hom. in Jo.* 81.3, almsgiving cures the soul of covetousness, anger, and pride. "He who takes care to show mercy to the one in need, will soon leave greediness (πλεονεκτεῖν) behind, he who perseveres in giving to the poor, will soon desert anger (ὀργή), and even will never be prideful (μέγα φρονήσει)."<sup>52</sup> This process also works by effecting the proper mindset toward wealth and possessions, as I will explain further in chapter three.

Thus, while the idea that almsgiving can heal every sin may only be a logical consequence of John's theological anthropology, the fact remains that his designations of almsgiving as a "medicine adapted to every wound" and as "the principle herb" in the medicine of repentance are unparalleled when compared to statements made by other ancient Christians who also promoted the healing power of almsgiving. Although John's strong descriptors of almsgiving as an all-purpose remedy appear to be unmatched, similar ideas concerning almsgiving's ability to inculcate virtues besides its opposing vice (e.g. generosity as countering greed) are present in the literature.

In the fifth-century *Vita* of St. Syncletica, a work falsely attributed to Athanasius, the saint asserts that the purpose of almsgiving is to teach one to love.<sup>53</sup> Love is not the exact opposite of greed; therefore, this is one example, apart from John, of the idea that almsgiving inculcates other virtues besides its opposite. Another fifth-century author, St. Leo the Great in *Serm.* 95, also puts forth the idea of mercy or almsgiving as engendering a virtue that is not its opposite. While discoursing on the beatitudes, he muses that almsgiving or being merciful to the poor leads to purity of heart.<sup>54</sup> While both of these authors

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Mayer, *Critical Approaches to Early Christianity* 1 (Boston: Brill, 2019), 247–275 (250–254); and Laird, *Mindset, Moral Choice, and Sin in the Anthropology of John Chrysostom*, 250.

51 Bae, "John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Therapy of the Soul," 78–94 (esp. 94), and 213.

52 PG 59, 442.

53 "Almsgiving has been ordained not so much for the feeding of the poor person as for the sake of love .... Just as circumcision of the foreskin was a sign of circumcision of the heart, so almsgiving has been appointed as a teacher of love." Ps.-Athanasius, v. *Syncl.*, lines 727–732 in L. Abelarga, ed. *The Life of Saint Syncletica. Introduction-Critical Text-Commentary* Byzantine Texts and Studies 31 (Thessalonika: Centre for Byzantine Research, 2002), 239–240.

54 See Leo the Great, *Serm.* 95.7 (CCSL 138a, 588). In this passage, Leo also cites Luke 11:41 and interprets it as meaning that giving alms purifies one's heart: "And since through almsgiving, all things are pure for you, you shall also attain to that blessedness which is promised in consequence of the Lord saying, 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God

share with John the concept of almsgiving engendering other virtues than their opposites, they are not so audacious as to claim that almsgiving heals any sin.

#### 4 Almsgiving Is Greater Than Virginity

Although John is not consistent in ranking almsgiving above every virtue and penitential practice, he is consistent in ranking it above ascetical practices such as fasting, lying on the ground, and even, perhaps surprisingly, virginity.<sup>55</sup> As several scholars have pointed out, once Christianity became legal in the Roman Empire in 313, with martyrdom no longer a widespread option, serious Christians began to embrace asceticism as the highest expression of one's devotion to Christ.<sup>56</sup> Peter Brown, in particular, has explained the process by which lifelong virginity came to be esteemed so highly among Christians from the first–fourth century CE.<sup>57</sup> Comments from several of John's homilies demonstrate the high pedestal on which his parishioners placed virginity and other ascetic activities. John, however, while acknowledging the difficulty and achievement of virginity, counseled the members of his church that it was not the highest virtue.

In *hom. in Mt.* 46.4, John states very plainly where almsgiving ranks with regard to virginity. “For the greatest thing is love and gentleness and almsgiving, which even outdoes virginity (ἡ καὶ παρθενίαν ὑπερῆχόντισεν). If, therefore, you wish to become equal to the apostles, there is nothing to prevent you. For to have practiced this virtue only is sufficient for not lacking any of the others.”<sup>58</sup> Similarly, in *hom. in Tit.* 6.2, John explains why almsgiving is more effective at combating sin than virginity and other ascetical practices.

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(Matt. 5:8).” He then asks rhetorically, “What, then, is it to have a pure heart but to strive after those virtues which are discussed above [the five former beatitudes, the last of which was being merciful]?”

55 See *hom. in Tit.* 6.2 (PG 62, 698); and *hom. in Jo.* 81.3 (PG 59, 442).

56 I am not suggesting asceticism replaced martyrdom after the legalization of Christianity, but simply, that it was an expression of devotion still open to most believers while the likelihood of martyrdom waned dramatically. On the point that asceticism was always a part of Christianity and provided the theoretical and practical basis for martyrdom, see Maureen A. Tilley, “The Ascetic Body and the (Un)Making of the World of the Martyr,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59/3 (1991): 467–479, esp. 467–468.

57 Peter Brown, *The Body & Society*, esp. 208–209 and 428–429.

58 PG 58, 481.

Virginity, and fasting, and lying on the ground, are more difficult labor than this, but nothing is so strong and powerful to extinguish the fire of our sins as almsgiving. Thus, this almsgiving is greater than all [other virtues] .... For virginity, fasting, and lying on the ground only establish the one who practices them, and no other is saved. But almsgiving extends to all, and embraces the members of Christ, and actions that extend to many are far greater than those which are confined to one.<sup>59</sup>

Simply put, according to John, almsgiving is greater than virginity because it benefits other people and leads to their eternal salvation while virginity only benefits the one who observes it. Exactly how almsgiving contributes to others' salvation will be discussed in the next chapter. For now, the focus will be on explaining John's biblical justification for ranking almsgiving above virginity.

The biblical passage John most often employs in support of almsgiving's superiority over virginity is the parable of the ten virgins in Matt. 25:1–13.<sup>60</sup> John understands the parable to teach that while virginity is not necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven, almsgiving is. While John holds that virginity is certainly the more challenging of the two virtues, he maintains that the lamp of virginity will go out without a continuous supply of the oil of almsgiving. In the parable, there are ten virgins with their lamps, waiting to meet the bridegroom. The latter, however, is delayed, and the virgins fall asleep while waiting for his arrival. When the bridegroom does finally arrive at midnight, the five foolish virgins have run out of oil and ask the five wise virgins if they can borrow some of theirs. The five wise virgins refuse, explaining that if they share some of their oil, they may also run out. They instruct the five foolish virgins to go to the merchants and buy oil from them. The foolish virgins do so, but when they return, the door to the wedding banquet is closed. They knock on the door and ask to be let in, but the bridegroom, now revealed as the Lord, replies, "Amen, I say to you, I do not know you (Matt. 25:12)."

Most ancient commentators read the story as an allegory and have viewed the oil as having particular significance for unlocking the narrative's meaning. Origen thinks the oil stands for the "spiritual word (λόγος τοῦ ψυχικοῦ)" or

59 PG 62, 698.

60 See Catherine Broc-Schmezer, "Chapitre IX: La Parole des Dix Vierges," in *Les Figures Féminines du Nouveau Testament dans l'Œuvre de Jean Chrysostome: Exégèse et pastorale* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2010), esp. 440–441, who notes that John ranked almsgiving over virginity due to the latter's greater usefulness to others.



“word of doctrine (*verbum doctrinae*).”<sup>61</sup> Hilary understands the oil to be the “fruit of good works (*boni operis fructus*).”<sup>62</sup> Augustine interprets it as the “joy of good works (*laetitia bonerum operum*)” done to please God rather than to win the praise of men.<sup>63</sup> John typically uses the words φιλανθρωπία (the love of humanity) and/or ἐλεημοσύνη (almsgiving) when discussing the meaning of the oil, but he sometimes understands it more broadly as any act of mercy to those in need, specifically, those acts of mercy mentioned in Matt. 25:31–46.

The earliest reference to the parable in John's works is in *Adversus Oppugnatores*, a treatise in which John tries to persuade both pagan and Christian fathers to allow their sons to pursue the monastic life. Noel Lenski dates the first book of the treatise to 375 during John's ascetical period and the second and third books to 380–381 during his diaconate.<sup>64</sup> In *oppugn.* 1.6, John only says that the five foolish virgins were kept from entering the wedding banquet because of their cruelty and inhumanity (ὠμότητα καὶ ἀπανθρωπίαν), but in 3.14, he says that the virgins were not able to enter because they lacked philanthropy (φιλανθρωπία).<sup>65</sup> John does not go into a great deal of explanation as to the parable's symbolism, but assumes that his audience already has a shared understanding of the passage. As he was not a priest, yet, his audience most likely would not have heard the interpretation from him at an earlier date. His readers may have heard the parable's explanation from one of his predecessors, for example, Meletius, the bishop who ordained John a deacon, or perhaps, it was the standard Antiochene interpretation of the parable in John's day. While

61 Origen, *comm. ser. in Mt.* 63 in *Origenes Werke XI. Commentarius in Matthaeum 11* (GCS 38, 147).

62 Hilary, *Mat.* 27.4 (SC 258, 206).

63 Augustine, *Quaest.* 59.3 (CCL 44A, 113). See also Thomas Aquinas, *Catena aurea*, in P. Angelici Guarienti, ed., *Catena Aurea in quator evangelia, Volume 1: Expositio in Matthaeum et Marcum* (Rome/Taurini: Marietti, 1953), 364, who provides an even fuller summary of the patristic interpretation of the oil.

64 Noel Lenski, “Valens and the Monks: Cudgeling and Conscription as a Means of Social Control,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 94–117, esp. 103–107. Illert, *Johannes Chrysostomus und das antiochenisch-syrische Mönchtum*, 12–17, dates the entire treatise to John's diaconate, between 380–381. Most previous scholars have dated the treatise to John's ascetical period (372–378). See Chrysostomus Baur, “John Chrysostom and His Time,” 117; B. de Montfaucon, PG 47:317–318; L. Meyer, *Saint Jean Chrysostome. Maître de perfection chrétienne* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1933), xv; J. Dumortier, *Saint Jean Chrysostome. Les cohabitations suspectes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1955), 15; and B. Grillet, *Saint Jean Chrysostome. À une jeune veuve. Sources Chrétiennes* 138 (Paris, 1968), 12.

65 *oppugn.* 1.6 (PG 47, 328); *oppugn.* 3.14 (PG 47, 374).

it is not likely that John was the first to put forth this reading, he is the one remembered throughout posterity as advancing it.<sup>66</sup>

Although John uses the word “philanthropy (φιλανθρωπία)” here to denote the oil, it is clear from the context that he understands this philanthropy to include care for the poor as he brings in the example of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke 16:19–31 right before he mentions the parable of the ten virgins. He explains that both the rich man and the virgins were not allowed to enter heaven because they were not sufficiently merciful toward the poor. His larger point in this context is that the same degree of virtue is required of both monks and married people, and he uses these two parables as an illustration. This passage demonstrates, that already, even when he had not yet been ordained a priest, in a treatise devoted to the praise of the monastic life, John stressed the importance of almsgiving over virginity. This is proof of just how early his views on this subject were formed.<sup>67</sup> It is not that John thinks almsgiving is more difficult than virginity. John is clear that virginity is more difficult, but it is not for that reason more noble.

In *hom. in Mt.* 78.1, John uses both “philanthropy (φιλανθρωπία)” and “almsgiving (ἐλεημοσύνη)” to interpret the symbolism of the oil. He is specifically preaching on Matt. 25:1–30, which includes the parable of the ten virgins (1–13) and the parable of the talents (14–30). He explains that the parable of the ten virgins refers specifically to showing mercy through almsgiving while the parable of the talents speaks of assisting one’s neighbor through whatever resources he or she has (money, encouraging words, patronage, etc.). In the parable of the virgins, the lamps signify the gift of virginity (παρθενίας χάρισμα), and the oil symbolizes “philanthropy, almsgiving, assistance to the needy (τὴν φιλανθρωπίαν, τὴν ἐλεημοσύνην, τὴν περὶ τοὺς δεομένους βοήθειαν).”<sup>68</sup> Thus, he uses the words φιλανθρωπία and ἐλεημοσύνη interchangeably in this context, understanding both as showing mercy to the poor, specifically.

In *poenit* 3.2, John discusses this parable once more, but this time, places more emphasis on the oil as almsgiving. Here, he states plainly: “For, virginity is the light, almsgiving is the oil (Τὸ γὰρ πῦρ ἐστὶν ἡ παρθενία, τὸ δὲ ἔλαιον ἐστὶν ἡ ἐλεημοσύνη).”<sup>69</sup> Commenting on verse 9, where the wise virgins tell the foolish ones to go and buy oil from the merchants, John asks, “Who are the traders of this oil?” He then answers his own question. “The poor, the ones who sit in

66 See J.A. Cramer, *Catenae Graecorum partum in Novum Testamentum* 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1840; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1867), 205–207.

67 See also Wendy Mayer, “John Chrysostom on Poverty,” 109.

68 PG 58, 711.

69 PG 49, 294.

front of the church for alms.”<sup>70</sup> He continues this rhetorical questioning, “For how much [do they sell it]?” He answers, “For as much as you want.” He then goes on to explain that it does not matter how poor the members of his audience are. Even if they protest that they do not have one obol, they can still give a glass of refreshing water (Matt. 10:42; Mark 9:41). Here, as in other passages from other works, John stresses that almsgiving may include other things than money. In *hom. in Rom.* 18.6, John expands the metaphor of the merchants even more. In this passage, there are many who sell this oil: “the naked, the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned.” John urges his congregants: “Feed these, clothe those, visit the bed-ridden, and the oil will come more than from fountains.”<sup>71</sup> John understands oil not just as almsgiving, but as mercy that the almsgiver collects for herself. When a person gives alms, it is like purchasing oil/mercy for oneself that quenches the fires of hell and saves one from eternal damnation.<sup>72</sup>

In both *hom. in Mt.* 78.1–2 and in *poenit* 3.2, John unambiguously teaches that virginity is harder to accomplish than almsgiving. That is, according to him, why the virgins were called foolish.

After [achieving] so much virtue, after training in virginity, after furnishing their bodies with wings to heaven, after competing for superiority with the powers on high and enduring the burning heat, after trampling upon the furnace of pleasure—then they were called foolish, and justifiably so. For although having accomplished something great, they were defeated by something small (*poenit.* 3.2).<sup>73</sup>

Similarly, in *hom. in Mt.* 78.2, John laments the final plight of the foolish virgins with these words: “After their many toils, after much sweat and that intolerable fight, and the trophies they had erected against the frenzied nature, disgraced, and with their lamps gone out, they withdrew, hanging their heads in shame.”<sup>74</sup> From these statements, there can be no doubt that John highly esteems virgin-

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> PG 60, 581/*hom.* 19 in Field, 323.

<sup>72</sup> See *hom. in Phil.* 5 in Field’s edition/*hom. in Phil.* 4 in PG (Field, Vol. v, 49 = PG 62, 212) where John expresses this idea more fully: “Let us show mercy toward our neighbor so that mercy may be shown to us. It is not so much for those but for ourselves that we gather together this mercy (ἐλεον). When the flame of fire is great, this oil (ἐλαιον) [i.e. mercy; Migne’s text has ἐλεος,] is that which quenches the fire, and this brings light to us. Thus, by this means shall we be freed from the fire of Gehenna.” (John is likely making a play on words as the Greek words for oil and mercy sound so similar.)

<sup>73</sup> PG 49, 294.

<sup>74</sup> PG 58, 713.

ity and considers it a remarkable feat. Yet, it is because almsgiving is so much easier in comparison with virginity that the culpability and subsequent punishment for not doing it are so much greater. Earlier in the homily, John instructs his congregation that greed and envy are more blameworthy than sexual sins precisely because they are easier to avoid.<sup>75</sup> He reminds his listeners that the grace of virginity was not given until the new dispensation, and even since that time, it has not been made a requirement. He references Paul in 1 Cor. 7:25, 35, pointing out that even though the apostle spoke highly of virginity, neither he nor Jesus made it an injunction (ἐπίταγμα).<sup>76</sup>

Unlike the exaltation of almsgiving over prayer and fasting to be discussed more in detail in the next chapter, there appears to be no precedent for ranking almsgiving above virginity. It is not that John's beliefs concerning virginity and almsgiving are that different from his Christian contemporaries, but his statements are more direct and provocative. Other Christians roughly contemporary with John, such as Augustine, suggest that almsgiving is necessary for salvation, and Ps.-Clement of Rome, interpreting the parable of the virgins similarly to John in that he sees the virgins as representing actual virgins rather than all Christians, concludes that virginity is not enough to gain one entrance to heaven.<sup>77</sup> Ephrem, in his *Letter to Publius*, similarly contends that virginity that is not "adorned with the good oil of excellent works" will be rejected.<sup>78</sup> Jerome perhaps comes closest to echoing John's statements concerning virginity and almsgiving. Although he does not say specifically that almsgiving is better than virginity, he maintains: "Justice (*iustitia*) alone is the great virtue and the mother of all [the other virtues]," greater even than chastity (*castitas*).<sup>79</sup> He explains that justice is greater than wisdom, fortitude, and chastity because while these virtues only please the one who practices them, justice pleases others.<sup>80</sup> Yet, although the justice of which Jerome speaks is justice on behalf of the poor and oppressed, he is speaking of justice, in general, and not specifically,

75 See *hom. in Mt.* 78.1 (PG 58, 711). See also Jaclyn Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity*, 124–129.

76 PG 58, 711.

77 Augustine, *Serm. Dom.* 2.2.7 (CCSL 35, 97); and Ps.-Clement, *ep. virg.* 1.3.3 in F.X. Funk, ed. *Patres Apostolici*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Laupp, 1901), 2–3.

78 Sebastian Brock, "Ephrem's Letter to Publius," *Le Muséon* 89 (1979): 261–305 (286–287).

79 Jerome, *Tract. psal.* 14 [15] (CCSL 78, 32–33). Jerome also contends that physical virginity by itself is not sufficient for salvation in *Ep.* 22.6 (Labourt, ed. *Lettres*, vol. 1, 115).

80 CCSL 78, 32. "*Quomodo iustitia maior est a ceteris virtutibus? Ceterae virtutes habentem delectant; iustitia non delectat habentem, sed alios.* (How is justice greater than the other virtues? The other virtues delight the one who has them; justice does not delight the one who has it, but others.)"

of almsgiving. Parallels for the strong rhetoric John employs to communicate almsgiving's superiority over virginity are thus elusive. Likewise, John's interpretation of the oil as almsgiving in Matt. 25:1–13 appears unattested in the extant literature preceding and contemporaneous with him.<sup>81</sup>

## 5 Almsgiving Is an Act That Mimics the Eucharistic Sacrifice

John again uses intense language when he compares the act of giving to the poor to the Eucharistic sacrifice. In *hom. in 2 Cor.* 20.3, he employs vivid sacramental language when discussing the relationship of the poor person to Christ.<sup>82</sup> In this passage, the almsgiver is the priest while the poor person is both the altar that receives Christ's body and the body of Christ, itself. Speaking of how the altar of the poor person is not only more awe-inspiring than the altar in the Old Testament, but even than the altar which receives the Eucharist, John explains to his audience:

For, this [altar] is wonderful on account of the sacrifice placed upon it, but that of the merciful person's, not only because of this, but also because

81 Romanos the Melodist appears to adopt John's interpretation of the parable of the ten virgins in *Hymn* 31.24 and 31.31 (SC 114, 356 and 364). See also Brown, *The Body & Society*, 321–322.

82 In addition to *hom. in 2 Cor.* 20.3, see *hom. in Mt.* 71.4 (PG 58,666), where John speaks of both the Eucharist and almsgiving as mysteries that should not be displayed but performed secretly. See also Catherine Broc-Schmezer, "De l'aumône faite au pauvre à l'aumône du pauvre. Pauvreté et spiritualité chez Jean Chrysostome," in *Les Pères de l'Église et la voix des pauvres. Actes du 11e colloque de La Rochelle, 2, 3 et 4 septembre 2005*, ed. Pascal Delage (La Rochelle: Association histoire et culture, 2006), 131–148 (141–142), who draws attention to how John employs similar language to almsgiving as he does to baptism, the Eucharist, and marriage. Although she is careful to acknowledge that sacramental theology in the fourth century was still developing and that John was not consistent in applying *μυστήριον* (the Greek word for sacrament which can also simply be translated as "mystery") to baptism, the Eucharist, or marriage, she rightly notes on p. 142: "Il n'en reste pas moins que l'on ne peut qu'être sensible aux similitudes que présente son discours sur l'aumône avec ce que sera, plus tard, la théologie des sacrements, et en particulier leur définition comme 'signes efficaces de la grâce'. On pourrait en outre ajouter qu'à l'exception de l'eucharistie, il ne semble pas parler de façon 'moins sacramentelle' de l'aumône que de ce que seront les autres sacrements. (Nevertheless, one can only be aware of the similarities in his speech on almsgiving with what will later become the theology of sacraments and, in particular, with their definition as 'effective signs of grace.' It could further be added that with the exception of the Eucharist, he does not seem to speak in a 'less sacramental' way of almsgiving than he does of what will become the other sacraments.)"

it is even composed of the sacrifice itself which causes the other to be wonderful. Again, this [altar] is wonderful because although a stone by nature, it becomes holy when it receives the body of Christ, but that other one is holy because it is itself Christ's body. So, this [altar] by which you, the layman are standing, is more awe-inspiring (φοικωδέστερον) than that [altar].<sup>83</sup>

Here, John even claims that the altar of the poor person is more amazing than the altar that receives the body of Christ in the Eucharist. It is admirable because of the sacrifice that is placed on it (i.e. the donor's contribution), but what makes it worthy of particular honor is that rather than being composed of stone, it is made up of Christ's sacrificial body, itself. John then rebukes his audience: "You indeed honor this altar because it receives Christ's body, but the one who is himself Christ's body, you treat spitefully and overlook when perishing .... When you see a poor believer, think that you behold an altar. When you see such a beggar, may you not only refrain from insulting him, but even respect him, and if you see another insulting him, prevent it, defend him [the beggar]."<sup>84</sup>

Although he does not explicitly make this connection in *hom. in 2 Cor.* 20, John's identification of the poor with Christ's body is based on his interpretation of Matt. 25:31–46.<sup>85</sup> In this passage, the scene is the last judgment in which Jesus himself separates the "sheep" from the "goats." The "sheep" are those who without being aware, gave him food and drink, welcomed him as a stranger, clothed him, and visited him while he was sick and in prison while the "goats" are the ones who failed to perform these acts of mercy. When both the ones who practiced these deeds and those who did not express surprise that they have cared or failed to care for Jesus in these ways, he explains that whatever

83 *hom. in 2 Cor.* 20.3 (PG 61, 540).

84 *Ibid.*

85 See Michael James De Vinne, "The Advocacy of Empty Bellies: Episcopal Representation of the Poor in the Late Roman Empire," (unpublished PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1995), 76–83, who elaborates on the patristic connection between Matt. 25:31–46, the broken bodies of the poor, and Christ's broken body on the cross. De Vinne, 78, states: "Assured by Christ's own words that the poor (re)present him in a special way, the church's spokesmen push their bodies as close as possible to his body in its most pressingly materialized form—hungry, thirsty, naked, bound, and broken open on the cross." See also Rudolf Brändle, *Matth. 25, 31–46 im Werk des Johannes Chrysostomos: Ein Beitrag zur Auslegungsgeschichte und zur Erforschung der Ethik der griechischen Kirche um die Wende vom 4. Zum 5. Jahrhundert*, Beiträge Zur Geschichte der Biblischen Exegese 22 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1979), esp. 293–294, where he connects John's understanding of Christ's presence in the poor, based on Matt. 25:31–46, with *hom. in 2 Cor.* 20.3.

they did or did not do for “the least” of his brothers, they did or did not do for him. The gist of the parable, therefore, is that whenever someone is merciful to a person in need, it is as if he or she were serving Christ, himself.

John was not the first person to equate a poor person with the altar of God. Polycarp, followed by the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions*, uses the analogy of a widow being an altar.<sup>86</sup> In addition, the *Didascalia* also refers to orphans as altars.<sup>87</sup> *Didasc.* 15 reads:

But let the widow know that she is the altar of God. And let her continually sit in her home, and let her not wander or go around to the houses of the believers to receive. The altar of God, indeed, never wanders or goes around anywhere, but is established in one place.<sup>88</sup>

One can infer from these passages that the offering of the almsgiver is the sacrifice, but no reference is made to the body of Christ. The widow or orphan is simply the altar, not the sacrifice. Furthermore, these works do not speak of a poor person or beggar specifically as being the altar, although widows and orphans were usually among the poor.

John also certainly was not the first Christian homilist to exploit the theme from Matt. 25:31–46 of the identification of Christ and the poor. According to Boniface Ramsey, Cyprian was the first Christian in the Latin West to quote the entirety of Matt. 25:31–46 in order to excite his audience to almsgiving.<sup>89</sup> After quoting the passage, Cyprian remarks:

What greater thing could Christ have declared to us? How more could he have stirred up the works of our justice and mercy? Why else did he say that whatever is performed for the needy and poor is performed for Himself ... So that he in the church who is not moved by consideration for his brother, may at least be moved by contemplation of Christ; and he who does not think of his fellow-servant in distress and indigence, may at least think of his Lord, who is constituted in that very man whom he despises.<sup>90</sup>

86 See Polycarp, *ep.* 4.3 in K. Bihlmeyer, ed. with a supplement by W. Schneemelcher, *Die Apostolischen Väter* ser. 2, vol. 1, pt. 1, 116; *Didasc.* 9 and 15 (CSCO 407, 104 and 160); and *Const. App.* 3.14 (SC 329, 150).

87 *Didasc.* 9 (CSCO 407, 104).

88 *Didasc.* 15 (CSCO 407, 160).

89 Ramsey, “Almsgiving in the Latin Church,” 226–227.

90 Cyprian, *Eleem.* 23 (CCL 3a, 70).

Ambrose also refers to Matt. 25:31–46 in several places in his writings. In *De Viduis* 9, 54, right before quoting Matt. 25:40, he states the idea very concisely: “Serve the poor, and you have served Christ.”<sup>91</sup> In these passages, although the idea of sacrifice is absent, there is a sacramental dimension in the act of almsgiving as one encounters Christ through the recipient of alms.

Yet, none of these Christian pastors equates the poor person with the sacrifice of Christ on the altar. John claims that the poor person is not only the altar, but the sacrifice, itself. The altar of the poor person is not holy because it receives the body of Christ, but because it is the body of Christ and composes the sacrifice that makes the altar holy. It receives the sacrifice of the donor's offering, but it is also the sacrifice, itself, because it is identical with Christ's body. This is strong language because John did see the Eucharist as being Christ's sacrificial body and a way for Christians to commune with their Lord, but he also saw the act of almsgiving as a very similar sacrifice, which allowed them to have a direct encounter with Christ.<sup>92</sup>

## 6 Almsgiving Delivers from a Temporal and Eternal Death

A final claim which John makes concerning almsgiving is that it can deliver one from a pre-mature, physical death. John again wields Tob. 4:10 and 12:9 in defense of his assertion. Both these verses state that almsgiving delivers from death (ἐκ θανάτου ῥύεται). In the narrative of Tobit, prayer, almsgiving, and acts of mercy, such as burying the dead, deliver Tobit's son Tobias from a pre-mature, physical death. John, however, also sees this statement regarding almsgiving's ability to deliver from death as being fulfilled in the stories of Tabitha, whom Peter raised from the dead in Acts 9:36–43, and Cornelius, a Gentile centurion to whom Peter was sent by God to convert and baptize in Acts 10:1–49. In Tabitha's case, her care for the poor delivered her from a temporal death, and in Cornelius' case, his prayers and almsgiving delivered him from an eternal death. In *hom. in Ac.* 22:3, where John is preaching on the story of Cornelius in Acts 10, he exclaims: “See how great is the power of alms (ἐλεημοσύνης), both in the former discourse [the story of Tabitha in Acts 9] and here! In the for-

91 Ambrose, *Vid.* 9, 54 (OOSA 14/1, 290).

92 John is consistent in maintaining that the eucharistic bread and wine truly become the body and blood of Christ. See *hom. in 1 Cor.* 24.1 (PG 61, 200); *hom. in Heb.* 17.3 (PG 63, 131). See also W. Lampen, “Doctrina S. Ioannis Chrysostomi de Christo se offerente in Missa,” *Antonianum* 18 (1943): 3–16, who discusses these and other passages in John's *homiliae in Joannem* which express this belief.



mer, it delivered from a temporal death; in the latter, from an eternal death, and opened the gates of heaven.”<sup>93</sup> John’s claim that almsgiving delivers one from a spiritual death is not surprising when compared to his contemporaries as this is simply another way of saying that almsgiving saves one from the eternal punishment of sin.<sup>94</sup> That almsgiving can deliver one from a physical death, however, would likely have been a more contentious claim.

In *hom. in Gen.* 55.4, John focuses on the narrative of Tabitha in Acts 9. He sees Tabitha’s virtue not in her giving of alms, but in her collecting of alms and caring for widows. “She worked each day to collect an abundance of alms, and she clothed, it [Scripture] says, the widows and provided for them every other assistance.”<sup>95</sup> In this case, ἐλεημοσύνη consists not just in giving money to the poor, but also in supplying them with clothing and other material needs. Although John wavers somewhat, he concludes that it was not the widows, but the Lord himself who delivered Tabitha from death through her care for them. “For with what such thing, tell me, did she provide the widows that they repaid her so much? She provided them with clothing and food, but they brought her back to life and caused death to flee from her—or, rather, not they, but our philanthropic Lord by means of her care for these.”<sup>96</sup> In this case, however, John’s interpretation is not entirely unique.

Cyprian is another early Christian who connects Tobit’s story with the raising of Tabitha in Acts 9 and the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10.<sup>97</sup> In *De opere et eleemosynis* 6, he describes how Tabitha’s almsgiving delivered her from a premature natural death. He points out that Tabitha had been known for her good works, including giving alms, and even depicts the widows who are present mourning her death as praying for Tabitha, not by *their* words, but by *her* deeds. Cyprian deduces from this example that almsgiving saves “not only from the second, but from the first death.”

Neither, dear brothers, are we bringing forth these things in order not to approve what the angel Raphael said by the testimony of the truth. In the Acts of the Apostles, the faith of the fact is set down; and that souls are delivered by almsgiving not only from the second, but from the first death,

93 PG 60, 175.

94 For John’s explanation of how almsgiving delivered Cornelius from a spiritual death, see *hom. in Ac.* 22.1–3 (PG 60, 171–175).

95 *hom. in Gen.* 55.4 (PG 54, 484).

96 Ibid.

97 For Cyprian’s association with the narrative of Cornelius in Acts 10 with that of Tobit, see *Dom. orat.* 32–33 (CCSL 3a, 32).

is discovered by the inspection of a matter sustained and completed. When Tabitha, being greatly given to good works and to giving alms, became sick and died, Peter was summoned to her lifeless body .... When, therefore, he had prayed ....he said, 'Tabitha, in the name of Jesus Christ, arise!' .... In this way, death is suspended, and the spirit is restored ... so potent were the merits of mercy, so efficacious were righteous works!<sup>98</sup>

The angel Raphael is the one speaking the words in Tob. 12:8–9, and Cyprian explains that the story of Tabitha being raised from the dead in Acts 9 confirms the truth of his saying—not just in a spiritual sense, but in a physical sense.

As Ps.-Martyrius states that John knew Latin, it is possible that John had read some of Cyprian's treatises and was directly influenced by him.<sup>99</sup> It is also possible that Cyprian's interpretation, whether originally his own or not, was known in Antioch and Constantinople. John, therefore, probably received this exegetical tradition and was not the first to assert almsgiving's power to save one from a physical death. In any case, other Greek and Latin-speaking Christians in the third and fourth centuries do not appear to have followed Cyprian and John in asserting almsgiving's power to deliver one from a pre-mature death, nor do they connect the stories of Cornelius and Tabitha with that of Tobit.<sup>100</sup> It is still, therefore, a rare claim that other early and late antique Christians probably did not feel confident in making, even though Scripture could be used to support the doctrine.<sup>101</sup>

98 *Eleem.* 6 (CCSL 3a, 5).

99 Ps.-Martyrius, *pan.* 50 (Martin Wallraff, ed. *Oratio Funebris in Laudem Sancti Iohannis Chrysostomi, epitaffio attribuito a Martirio di Antiochia*. Quaderni della Rivista di Bizantinistica 12 [Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'alto Medioevo, 2007], 102. See also, J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose and John Chrysostom: Clerics between Desert and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 242–243 and 262–263, who thinks that John did know Latin and was possibly influenced by some of Ambrose's writings.

100 Interestingly, Babylonian rabbinic authors in the Amoraic period (roughly 200–500 CE) do assert that almsgiving delivers one from a physical death, although they do not regard Tobit or Acts as canonical. See *b. Shabbath* 156a–b and *b. Baba Bathra* 10a–b in I. Epstein, ed. *The Babylonian Talmud Seder Mo'ed Shabbath*, vol. 3, trans. H. Freedman (New York: Rebecca Bennet Publications, 1959), 800–801 and *The Babylonian Talmud Seder Nezikin Baba Bathra*, vol. 1, trans. Maurice Simon (New York: Rebecca Bennet Publications, 1959), 48. See Walker, "The Salvific Effects of Almsgiving and the Moral Status of the Poor," esp. 7–14 for a more in-depth discussion of almsgiving delivering from death in John, Cyprian, and the Babylonian Talmud.

101 Cyprian and John may have inherited the idea that almsgiving saves from a physical and spiritual death from the scriptural authors, themselves. The author of Tobit likely held the view that almsgiving could save one from a premature physical death as there is no evidence for belief in an afterlife of rewards and punishments in Tobit. See Joseph

## 7 Conclusion

I have shown in this chapter that while early and late antique Christians believed that through baptism, Jesus' death could atone for all sins committed up to that point, they interpreted scriptures such as Heb. 6:4–6 to mean that more arduous forms of repentance were needed to remit sins committed after baptism. They appealed to several scriptures in the Septuagint and interpreted others in the New Testament to develop the doctrine that almsgiving could, in some way, cancel or counteract these sins. John adopted this teaching from his predecessors and also may have taken over the idea that almsgiving could deliver one from a pre-mature physical death from Cyprian's *De opere et eleemosynis*.

John appears to go beyond the tradition, however, in claiming that almsgiving ranks above virginity and can cleanse *every* sin, counterbalance all sin, and be applied as an effective remedy for every wound. While other ancient authors and homilists may have made similar statements, well-known early and late-antique Christians who also taught redemptive almsgiving, such as Origen, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine, stop short of making such claims regarding almsgiving's sin-erasing properties. John also surpasses his predecessors in describing the act of almsgiving as mimicking the Eucharistic sacrifice, with the almsgiver acting as the priest and the poor person serving as both altar and victim.

While John often uses these cleansing, healing, extinguishing, rejuvenating, and financial metaphors interchangeably, I think it is clear from his remarks

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A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 171; and Carey A. Moore, *Tobit: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 40A (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 168, 270. Some scholars even suggest that the author of Luke-Acts may have taught such a doctrine. See Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity*, 66–68, who considers it possible that the author of Acts meant to imply that Tabitha was raised from the dead because of her almsgiving; and Downs, *Alms*, 135–138, who leans toward the view that the story of Cornelius in Acts 10 is an example of “atoning almsgiving,” but denies that the story of Tabitha in Acts 9 presents such a view. Although Downs does not think that Acts' author was dependent on the narrative of Tobit, he does point out some similarities in vocabulary between Acts 10:4, 31 and Tob. 12:12. See Susan Docherty, “The Reception of Tobit in the New Testament and Early Christian Literature, with Special Reference to Luke-Acts,” 81–94 in Bart Koet, Steve Moyise, and Joseph Verheyden, eds. *The Scriptures of Israel in Jewish and Christian Tradition: Essays in Honour of Maarten J.J. Menken*, Novum Testamentum, Supplements 148 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), for additional parallels between Tobit and Luke-Acts; and Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, Fortress, 2009), 268, who suggests that Acts 10:4b may be directly dependent on Tob. 12:12.

that he sees almsgiving as dealing with sin in at least two ways. First, almsgiving can save one from the eternal consequences of sin (i.e. eternal death or damnation). This is evident from John's commentary on Cornelius in Acts 10. This is what I referred to as "salvific" almsgiving in the introduction. Second, almsgiving can reverse the spiritual effects of sin on the soul. The healing and some of the cleansing metaphors discussed in this chapter and the rejuvenating metaphors mentioned in the following chapter communicate this. Almsgiving heals the wounds of sin, cleanses the stain of sin, and reverses the aging effects of sin on the soul. In this case, almsgiving is "transformative." This relates to how almsgiving deifies the Christian, which will be one of the subjects of the following chapter.



**PART 2**

***Why Almsgiving Is the Essential  
Virtue in John's Thought***





## Introduction to Part 2

In Part 1, I demonstrated that John goes beyond many of his predecessors and contemporaries in the power he grants almsgiving to forgive sins and in his exaltation of almsgiving over other ascetic practices. In Part 2, I examine reasons why John made these expansive and audacious claims. In chapter three, I discuss John's own explanations for why almsgiving was "the queen of the virtues," beyond its well-established ability to atone for post-baptismal sin, and show that he used different arguments to appeal to different groups in his audience based on their level of spiritual fervor and maturity. In chapters four, five, and six, I dig deeper to expose the less obvious, often unstated, and perhaps even unconscious reasons why this late antique homilist and clergyman raised almsgiving to such an exalted status. In chapter four, I argue that the lack of a strict penitential system in Antioch, and especially, in Constantinople led John to stress almsgiving as a penance for even the most serious sins of murder, adultery, and apostasy. I contend in chapter five that John used almsgiving as a means to unify the rich and poor and married and celibate members of his congregation. Finally, in chapter six, I demonstrate that John solicited alms to increase his credibility as a "patron of the poor" and thus, be able to compete successfully with other Christian, sectarian, and religious groups.



## Benefits of Almsgiving Beyond the Forgiveness of Post-Baptismal Sin

When John attempted to persuade his congregants to give alms, his strategy was not usually to appeal to their sense of social justice or shared humanity with the poor. His main rhetorical tactic was to show them how almsgiving served their self-interests. For the less mature members of his congregation, John emphasized almsgiving as a way to atone for their post-baptismal sin, win respect and admiration from others, and store up reward for themselves in the afterlife. For those in his audience who were more spiritually mature, however, John reserved a slightly different line of argument. Almsgiving did not simply remit the punishment due to sin, but reversed its effects. Almsgiving had a transformative effect on the soul and even deified the donor. Furthermore, alms strengthened the effects on one's intercessions, decreased the suffering of deceased loved ones not in heaven, and drew unbelievers to the church who were either the recipients or witnesses of this charity.

### 1 Benefits for the Donor: Fame, Material Benefits, and Security for the Afterlife

#### 1.1 *Almsgiving Achieves Undying Reputation*

Perhaps the least noble benefit of almsgiving that would appeal to John's vainer parishioners is that it achieves for them undying reputation among their peers, which lasts even after their death. As David Rylaarsdam has pointed out, sometimes John temporarily adopts his audience's cultural values in order to abolish them.<sup>1</sup> John is against pursuing love of honor (φιλοτιμία), but for the purpose of gradually leading his more immature members to higher virtue, he initially encourages it. He simply urges them to pursue a higher honor. In *hom. in Gen.* 30.2, John urges his congregants not to waste their time building houses and baths and streets in order to be remembered by posterity. He does not seem to be referring to the Greco-Roman practice of euergetism here. Rather, he appears to have in mind the construction of houses and buildings solely for the

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<sup>1</sup> Rylaarsdam, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy*, 254–261, esp. 258–259.

enjoyment of the one who builds them, for he indicates that people slander the deceased person because of these buildings rather than honor him. "Indeed, this is not to enjoy remembrance, but to be hit by continuous accusations, to be scorned publicly after death, and whet the tongues of onlookers to slander and accusation of the one who acquired these possessions."<sup>2</sup> John even specifies what some of this condemnation consists of, placing in the mouths of imaginary critics the following accusations: "belonging to so-and-so, the greedy person, the robber, plunderer of widows and orphans." As for those who have been kind to the poor, however, John envisages that people will describe them as "so merciful and benevolent, so gentle and good." Bringing in Ps. 112:9, a traditional messianic passage for Christians, John applies it to any giver of the poor. He first quotes the verse, "'He scattered,' it says, 'he gave to the poor; his righteousness endures through the ages.'" Then, he remarks: "He scattered his wealth in one day, and his righteousness continues for all ages and achieves undying remembrance .... Therefore, let us be eager to be remembered for buildings such as these."<sup>3</sup> John proceeds to remind his auditors that the titles to their properties will simply pass to someone else after they die—someone, perhaps, they do not even like. In light of this reality, therefore, they should recall the example of Tabitha in Acts 9. The widows to whom she was so generous cried out to Peter on her behalf and persuaded him to restore her to life. John skillfully presents the example of Tabitha as a stark contrast to those who try to build a name for themselves by accumulating large possessions, normally acquired, in his opinion, through the exploitation of widows and orphans.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2 *Almsgiving Is a Bond That Is Repaid Both in This Life and the Next*

Another benefit of almsgiving that John presents in financial terms is almsgiving as a way of making a sure investment in the afterlife. He may have directed this line of argument at those who did not consider themselves to be big sinners but whose primary motivation to live justly was a concern for their eternal

<sup>2</sup> PG 53, 276.

<sup>3</sup> *hom. in Gen.* 30.2–3 (PG 53, 276).

<sup>4</sup> See also Basil of Caesarea, *Destruam horrea mea/hom.* 6.3 (old numbering) and 322.3 (new numbering) in Y. Courtonne, ed. *Saint Basile: Homélie sur la richesse* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1935), 21, where he cries out to his audience in exasperation: "Why then, are you troubled? Why do you wear yourselves out, striving to enclose your wealth through bricks and clay? 'A good name is better than great riches (Prov. 22:1)' .... When you stand before the common judge, all the people surrounding you will call you 'Nourisher' and 'Benefactor' and all the other names associated with philanthropy." The only difference in Basil's rhetoric compared to that of John is that the people praising the hypothetical donor are in heaven rather than on earth.

destination rather than the temporal good of their neighbor. John urges his parishioners that when they give alms, they do not lose anything. They do not even risk anything. They are guaranteed of making a profit. He uses various financial terminology to communicate this thought, but he derives the idea, in part, from Matt. 6:20; 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 12:33; 18:22; and Prov. 19:17. While the first five verses contain the phrase, “treasure in heaven (θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανοῖς),” the sixth promises that when one shows mercy to the poor, he lends to God, who will repay the loan in full.<sup>5</sup> Although John uses the phrase “treasure in heaven” seven times in his corpus, it is always in the context of the story of the rich young ruler. He does not broaden the application but reserves this reward for those who have renounced everything.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, he does not speculate on what this treasure is, but seems content simply to quote the words of Jesus in order to make his point. On the other hand, while he only explicitly refers to Prov. 19:17 four times in his writings, he develops this image of God as a debtor much more fully.<sup>7</sup>

In *hom. in Gen.* 3.6, John claims that God does not simply pay back the loan at 100 percent interest but pays back one hundred times the amount lent.

Scripture says, “The person who is merciful to the poor lends to God.” See how this loan works in a strange and paradoxical way. The one receiving and the one making himself liable for it are different. This is not all, but there is also no lack of gratitude for the loan or any other loss. For, he does not only promise to give 100 percent on the loan, as here with us, but a hundred times the amount lent. And he does not stop at this, but these things come to us in the present and in the future, that is, eternal life.<sup>8</sup>

John points out that although one lends to the poor, God takes responsibility for the repayment and shows no resentment when paying the loan. On the contrary, God voluntarily and gladly pays an unbelievably high rate of interest—

5 For the idea in early Christianity of losing wealth on earth to store up treasure in heaven, see Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 1–5, 38, 45, and 47.

6 See *hom. in Mt.* 63.1–2, 64.1, and 90.4 (PG 58, 604–605, 609, 792); *hom. in 2 Cor.* 13.4 (PG 61, 496); *hom. in Heb.* 13.3 (PG 63, 138).

7 See *hom. in Mt.* 15.9 (PG 57, 235) and 66.5 (PG 58, 632); *hom. in Gen.* 3.6 (PG 53, 38); and *hom. in 1 Cor.* 15.6 (PG 61, 130). See also Maria Verhoeff, “A Genuine Friend Wishes to Be a Debtor: John Chrysostom’s Discourse on Almsgiving Reinterpreted,” *Sacris Erudiri* 52 (2013): 47–66, esp. 49–50.

8 PG 53, 38.

not just 100 percent, but onehundred times the amount borrowed. Finally, he repays both in this life and in heaven.

In other homilies, John seems to be responding to an objection from some in his audience that they do not see God's rewards for their giving. He responds by admonishing them to be patient and not to demand all of the repayment in this life.

But if you are in a hurry and do not wait for the time of repayment, think of those who lend money to humans. For not even these wish to receive their interest immediately, but they want the principal to remain in the hands of the borrower for a longer period, provided that the repayment is secure and they do not suspect the borrower of stealing. May this be done in the present case as well. Place your wages with God so that he may pay you back many times over. Do not seek it all here; for if you receive the whole here, how will you receive it back there? And it is because of this that God reserves it there, seeing that this present life is subject to decay. But he gives it even here; for, "Seek," he says, "the kingdom of heaven, and all these things will be added to you." (*hom. in 1 Cor.* 15.6)<sup>9</sup>

John shows in this homily that he clearly believes God rewards almsgiving in this life, and based on the context of Matt. 6:33, which he quotes, it seems that he views this reward as being material. In the context of Matt. 6:25–34, Jesus is counselling the crowd not to worry about how they will provide for their material necessities, but to focus on attaining the kingdom of God. If they do this, Jesus assures them that God will also provide everything they need for their earthly subsistence. Furthermore, John explains that God does not pay his creditors back in this present life because it is full of decay. If he had spiritual rewards in mind, he most likely would not have described them as decaying—even in this life.<sup>10</sup>

In *hom. in Mt.* 66.5, he goes on to answer another one of his congregation's apparent excuses as to why they cannot give alms. "But, you are doubtless looking at your children, and are you reluctant for the sake of these?"<sup>11</sup> Apparently, some in John's audience had protested that they could not give alms because

9 PG 61.130.

10 See also John, *hom. in Mt.* 66.5 (PG 58, 632), where John speaks of God already having given us an earnest (ἀρράβωνα) for almsgiving in this present life—an earnest that includes "the sensible things, the spiritual things, the prelude of things to come (τὰ αἰσθητὰ, τὰ πνευματικά, τὰ προοίμια τῶν μελλόντων)."

11 PG 58, 632.

they needed to leave their children an inheritance. He responds by explaining that if the parents give alms now, God will be a debtor to their children after they die. John continues by bringing in examples from real life. He points out that they do not sell their lands and give the proceeds to their children but leave the lands to their children so that they can continue to receive income from them. Similarly, if they did have some money lent out to a dependable borrower that was bearing interest, they would not want to collect repayment now, but would leave the bond to their children so that it could gather interest. Furthermore, John argues, the parents still take the bond away with them when they die, despite having left it for their children. "But this bond, which is more productive than any land or revenues, and bears so many fruits, are you afraid to leave this to them? ... And this, when you know that although you should leave it to them, you shall depart, taking it with you also."<sup>12</sup> He demolishes every possible excuse his listeners can put forward for not giving alms. According to John, when one gives alms, it is a guaranteed investment, both for this life and for the one to come. He does not speculate on the type of heavenly reward almsgiving brings, but he indicates that there is some type of material earthly reward as well. At the very least, based on John's reading of Matt. 6:33, the person who gives alms is assured that God will provide her with the necessities for survival. Not only does almsgiving bring with it material and spiritual rewards for the donor, but it also secures a reward for the donor's children in that it makes God a debtor to the offspring once the donor has passed. The former idea is pervasive in ancient Christianity, but the latter appears to belong uniquely to John.<sup>13</sup>

## 2 Benefits for the Donor: Effectual Prayers and Personal Transformation

### 2.1 *Almsgiving Gives Wings to Prayers*

John frequently links almsgiving with prayer and fasting. He consistently ranks almsgiving above fasting, and while he does not always rank almsgiving above prayer, he is insistent that the former makes the latter more efficacious.<sup>14</sup> One

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus references Prov. 19:17 and develops the image of God as a debtor in *Or.* 17.10 (PG 35, 977). See also Maximus of Turin, *Serm.* 27.1 (CCSL 23, 105), who speaks of the poor person as the rich man's treasure chest that does not consume the alms but guards them until the day of judgment.

<sup>14</sup> John was certainly not the first Christian to associate almsgiving with prayer and fasting,

way in which he illustrates this is by pointing to the example of Cornelius in Acts 10. Cornelius was a devout Gentile centurion who is described as giving alms and praying regularly. According to Acts' author, an angel appeared to him one day when he was praying and told him that God had noticed his prayers and almsgiving (Acts 10:4). The apostle Peter was sent to preach to him and his household through a vision from God, and the Holy Spirit came upon him and his family even before Peter baptized them.

John alludes to this passage in *hom. in Mt.* 77.6, urging his audience to practice those virtues, such as prayer and almsgiving, which serve to build up their neighbors.

And let us seek those virtues, which, along with our own salvation, can benefit our neighbor to the greatest extent. Such is almsgiving; such is prayer, but even the latter becomes more powerful and is given wings by the former. "For your prayers," it says, "and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God (Acts 10:4)."<sup>15</sup>

Almsgiving, John contends, supplies one's prayers with wings so they may come before the throne of God.<sup>16</sup> As he mentions that prayer and almsgiving benefit one's neighbor, it is likely, by "prayer," he means petitions for others. While the idea of fasting making one's prayers efficacious may be more familiar, being attested in such Hebrew scriptures as Dan. 9:1–3 and in New Testament textual variants such as Mark 9:29 and Acts 10:40, John claims that almsgiving makes both one's prayers and one's fasting efficacious.<sup>17</sup> In fact, later in this passage, he

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nor the first to rank almsgiving above both. See 2Clem., 16.4 in Bihlmeyer and Schneemelcher, eds. *Die Apostolischen Väter* ser. 2, vol. 1, pt. 1, 79, where the author, in a likely allusion to Tob. 12:8–9, asserts: "Fasting is better than prayer, and almsgiving is better than both." Although the text of Tob. 12:9 associates almsgiving with prayer and fasting, it does not rank one above the other, but says simply: "Prayer with fasting and almsgiving and righteousness is good."

15 PG 58, 710. See also Ramsey, "Almsgiving in the Latin Church," 244–246. Ramsey makes the point on p. 244 that in the Latin-speaking West during the fourth and fifth centuries, almsgiving is frequently mentioned along with either prayer or fasting as a means of redeeming sin but not usually with both and that prayer and fasting are rarely ever mentioned without almsgiving.

16 Peter Chrysologus and Augustine use the metaphor of almsgiving as wings. Chrysologus describes mercy and piety as the wings of fasting in *Serm.* 8, 2–3 (CCSL 24, 60–61), and Augustine refers to fasting and almsgiving as the wings of prayer in *Serm.* 206, 3 (PL 38, 1042).

17 For further discussion of scriptural passages on fasting making one's prayer's efficacious, see Brandon Walker, "This Kind Comes Only Comes Out by Prayer (and Fasting):

claims that fasting without almsgiving is pointless. “Not only prayer but fasting also has strength from this source. For, if you should fast without almsgiving, the action is not reckoned as a fast (οὐδὲ νηστεία τὸ πρᾶγμα λογίζεται).”<sup>18</sup> John even goes as far as to say that the one who fasts without giving alms is worse than a glutton and a drunkard. The latter are guilty of the sin of luxury (τρυφῆς), but the former is guilty of the sin of cruelty (ὠμότης).

In *hom. in Heb.* 11.3, John again points to Cornelius as a model of one who effectively combined prayer and almsgiving, but also brings in Prov. 21:13 as the negative corollary to what happens if prayer is not combined with almsgiving. “For, Scripture says, ‘your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.’ You see a most excellent union. Then we are heard, when we ourselves also hear the poor who approach us. ‘He,’ it says, ‘who stops his ears so as not to hear the poor (Prov. 21:13), his supplication God will not hear.’”<sup>19</sup> In this passage, John calls attention to the fact that Scripture even makes almsgiving a requirement for answered prayer. It is as if one’s prayers do not even reach God without the wings of almsgiving. Viewed in this way, almsgiving does not so much result in benefit as refusing to give alms results in punishment. If one refuses to respond to the cries of the poor person, God, in turn, will refuse to acknowledge his own cries for help. This passage and the one from *hom. in Mt.* 77.6 also reveal that John does not view prayer and fasting on an equal level with almsgiving. On the contrary, prayer and fasting are completely impotent and devoid of merit without the accompaniment of almsgiving.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.2 *Personal Transformation: Ethical Deification*

One of almsgiving’s most wonderful benefits is that it transforms the donor into a more virtuous person. In *hom. in Jo.* 81.3, John explains:

This [almsgiving] is better even than fasting, or lying on the ground; they may be more arduous and painful, but this is more profitable. It enlight-

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Fasting, Ritual Efficacy and Magical Thinking in Early Christianity,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 31.1 (2017): 43–52.

18 PG 58, 710.

19 PG 63, 94.

20 John was not unique in these sentiments. See *Hermas*, *sim.* 5.1.1–4 and 5.3.7 in Molly Whitaker, ed. *Die Apostolischen Väter 1: Der Hirt des Hermas* (GCS 48, 2nd ed., 52 and 55); and *Const. App.* 5.20.18 (SC 329, 284), for the idea that one was expected to give to the poor in alms what he/she saved from fasting. For the uselessness of fasting without almsgiving, see Cyprian, *Eleem.* 5 (CCSL 3a, 58); Chrysologus, *Serm.* 8, 2–3 (CCSL 24, 60–61); and Augustine, *Serm.* 150 6, 7 (PL 38, 812); and for the need for fasting in order for one’s prayers to be effective, see Augustine, *Psal.* 43 [42], 8 (CCSL 38, 480).

ens the soul, makes it sleek, beautiful, and youthful .... He who takes care to show mercy to the one in need, will soon leave greediness behind, he who perseveres in giving to the poor, will soon desert anger, and will never even be prideful.<sup>21</sup>

Almsgiving beautifies, strengthens, enlightens, and renews the soul. If practiced regularly, it enables one to be free from greediness, anger, and pride. John says elsewhere that sin “puts filth upon the soul” and that it ages the soul.<sup>22</sup> He explains how sin is a habit.<sup>23</sup> Here, almsgiving beautifies the soul, reverses the aging effects of sin, and breaks bad habits. Almsgiving does not simply settle one’s accounts with God. It makes one a more virtuous person. Although he did not employ the terms *θέωσις* or *θεοποίησις*, John even went as far to say that almsgiving made one like God. According to John’s understanding, almsgiving makes one like God primarily through an imitation of God’s mercy, part of what I will refer to as “ethical deification.” This is based on the categories established by Norman Russell in his 2004 monograph, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*.<sup>24</sup> According to Russell, the ethical approach involves the idea of “attaining *likeness* [Greek: *ὁμοίωσις*] to God” through “ethical and philosophical endeavor.” The Christian seeks to reproduce “some of the divine attributes ... by imitation.”<sup>25</sup> For instance, in the case of almsgiving, the almsgiver seeks to become merciful like God by imitating God’s mercy.

One of the ways almsgiving deifies a Christian is by healing mercy’s opposing vices. John envisions the vices as wounds with the opposite virtues serving as remedies for these wounds. For example, almsgiving is the remedy for greed just as chastity is the remedy for fornication and kindness is the remedy for slander.<sup>26</sup> Almsgiving, however, is not only a remedy for its opposing

21 PG 59, 442.

22 For sin putting filth on the soul, see *hom. in Jo.* 73.2–3 (PG 59, 398). For sin aging the soul, see *hom. in Ro.* 20.2 (PG 60, 598). For sin as producing stains and wrinkles, see *catech.* 6.22 (SC 50, 226).

23 For sin as a habit, see *poenit.* 8.1 (PG 49, 338), to be discussed in detail in chapter four.

24 Specifically, Russell refers to this as “metaphorical deification” (Greek: *θέωσις*), using the “ethical approach.” See Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–3 for a discussion of the three principal ways early Christians used deification language.

25 Ibid, 2.

26 *hom. in Jo.* 34.3 (PG 59, 197). For other late antique prescriptions of applying the opposite virtue to heal a vice, see Gregory of Nyssa, *ep. can.* 6 in Ekkehardus Mühlenberg, ed. *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 3/5 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 11; and Chromatius of Aquileia, *Serm.* 12.7 (CCSL 9A, 56). For the Christian derivation of this concept from ancient Greek medical theory, see Thomas M. Walshe III, *Neurological Concepts in Ancient Greek Medicine*



vice. According to John, almsgiving helps one to overcome other related vices as well. In *hom. in Jo.* 81.3, quoted above, John communicates something of the progressive effects of regular almsgiving upon the soul. “He who takes care to show mercy to the one in need, will soon leave greediness behind; he who perseveres in giving to the poor, will soon desert anger, and will never even be prideful.”<sup>27</sup> Here, one can discern John’s view of how almsgiving gradually frees one from various vices. First, almsgiving counters its opposite vice of greed, but if one perseveres in this practice, she also finds herself being freed from other negative attitudes and habits—in this case, anger and pride.

Almsgiving frees one from these latter vices by giving one the proper mindset or attitude toward money. We can see John’s line of reasoning more clearly in *hom. in Phil.* 1. In this context, he is explicating the famous aphorism from 1 Tim. 6:10: “Love of money is the root of all evil.” He explains, “If we learn to despise money, we shall learn other things besides. For look how many good things are engendered from there! He who gives alms as he ought, learns to despise wealth. He who has learned to despise wealth has cut out the root of evils (ρίζαν τῶν κακῶν).”<sup>28</sup> Later on in the passage, John claims that the one who has been “educated in this with regard to his mind (τοῦτο δὲ παιδευθεὶς τὴν διάνοιαν) ... has cut out countless motives for strife, quarreling, envy, and despondency.”<sup>29</sup> As Raymond Laird has pointed out, John saw almsgiving as an instrument for positively changing a person’s mindset (γνώμη).<sup>30</sup> Laird argues this point on the basis that John saw almsgiving as training for repentance and that repentance is defined as a change of mind.<sup>31</sup> In this light, once a person has changed his or her mindset or attitude toward money, envy, occasions for conflict, and despondency over not having enough wealth naturally subside.<sup>32</sup>

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 90–94; Natalie Brigit Molineaux, *Medici et Medica-menta: The Medicine of Penance in Late Antiquity* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 196; G.E.R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), esp. 15–171; and G.S. Kirk and J. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 234.

27 PG 59, 442.

28 *hom. in Phil.* 1 in Field, 6 = *hom. in Phil.* pref. in PG 62, 181.

29 Field, 6 = PG 62, 182.

30 Laird, *Mindset, Moral Choice and Sin in the Anthropology of John Chrysostom*, 131–132.

31 Ibid. For John’s description as almsgiving as a training (γυμνάζω) for repentance, see *poenit.* 3 (PG 49, 292).

32 The importance of changing one’s mindset in order to reform one’s behavior is also underlined by Plato in his *Laws* 731b–d. See Julia Hillner, *Prison, Punishment, and Penance in Late Antiquity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 30–31, who points out that the purpose of criminal punishment, according to Plato, was not so much to bring about a

So, also, at the other end of the spectrum, does pride in one's status and possessions. In John's own words, "the one who gives alms is taught not to marvel at money or gold .... He clears the eyes of his soul."<sup>33</sup> One is able to see riches for what they are and to estimate their value rightly. This clear vision then frees one from continually grasping after wealth or from holding on to his possessions too tightly. Almsgiving, thus, enables one to perceive truth and reality.

Yet another way in which almsgiving transforms the donor, according to John, is in increasing one's readiness and desire to continue doing good. Specifically, it makes one more likely to be generous on future occasions. In explaining how Phil. 2:13, which states: "God is the one working in you both to will and to work his good pleasure," does not negate human free will, John claims that through our doing good works, God makes our willingness to do good even greater. To quote John himself: "He [God] does not take away our free will (αὐτεξούσιον), but he shows that by doing good works (ἀπὸ τοῦ κατορθοῦν), we receive much readiness in willing (πολλὴν εἰς τὸ θέλαιν λαμβάνομεν προθυμίαν)."<sup>34</sup> He goes on to provide examples, one of which is giving alms. He asks: "Did you give alms? You are more inclined to give. Did you not give alms? You are more inclined to be slack in this regard."<sup>35</sup> The idea which John is espousing is that when a person sees the fruit of her good works, she is motivated to try even harder. John quotes the first part of Prov. 18:3 ("Whenever a wicked man comes into the depth of evil, he becomes contemptuous."). Then, he draws a parallel. "Just as, then, whenever one comes into the depth of evil he becomes contemptuous, so also, whenever one comes into the depth of goodness, he becomes more zealous. For just as the former one, losing hope, becomes idle, so also the latter, considering the multitude of good [gained], becomes more zealous, fearing lest he lose everything."<sup>36</sup> Thus, John sees both virtue and sin as habit-forming. Just as sin makes one more attached to and prone to sin, so almsgiving and other virtues make one more attached to and predisposed to doing good.

John maintains that almsgiving not only heals vices and increases one's desire to do good, but inculcates virtues and even makes one like God.<sup>37</sup> Alms-

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"change of conduct," but a "change of mind." She further observes that Plato viewed all wrongdoing as a result of a "state of injustice (ἀδικία) in the soul" and had to be treated by a "change toward a regimen of good actions."

33 Field, 6 = PG 62, 181–182.

34 *hom. in Phil.* 9.2 (PG 62, 240).

35 *Ibid.* (PG 62, 240).

36 *Ibid.* (PG 62, 240).

37 See also Verhoeff, "A Genuine Friend Wishes to be a Debtor," 47–66 (64); idem, "More Desirable than Light Itself: Friendship Discourse in John Chrysostom's Soteriology," (unpublished PhD dissertation, Louvain: Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, 2016), 113; and Bae,

giving makes one like God because God is merciful, and in giving alms, one becomes merciful. In *hom. in Heb.* 32.3, John personifies mercy in a way similar to Lady Wisdom in the wisdom literature of the Jewish scriptures. Mercy is a queen, an art, a bird, and a virgin with wings—all in the same passage. God allows himself to be moved by Mercy's petitions on behalf of humanity, and the Son of God is so swayed by her that he divests himself of his divinity in order to save the human race. Yet, Mercy not only moves God, but humanity as well. In the middle of this long discourse, John cries out concerning her work in the human heart: "She is truly a queen, making humans like God. For, you will be merciful as your father is merciful (Luke 6:36)."<sup>38</sup> In modern editions, Luke 6:36, the verse which John cites, reads: "Be merciful, therefore, as your father is merciful."<sup>39</sup> As Catherine Broc-Schmezer has noted, however, John transforms this from a command into a promise by changing the verb from an imperative into a future indicative.<sup>40</sup> This is a significant point because he is not simply urging his listeners to imitate God, but is saying that showing mercy through almsgiving will make them like God. John envisions the members of his flock giving alms not because they are already merciful, but in order to become merciful through their giving of alms.<sup>41</sup> Almsgiving, thus, not only heals the sin of avarice, but inculcates the virtue of mercy.<sup>42</sup>

Closely related to the idea of almsgiving making one merciful like God, John teaches that almsgiving engenders and nourishes other virtues—particularly, love. In *hom. in Ac.* 22.3, John pictures almsgiving as a pure, refreshing fountain,

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*John Chrysostom: On Almsgiving and the Therapy of the Soul*, 160–161. Both Verhoeff and Bae have argued that almsgiving plays a central role in John's doctrine of deification and describe this deification as occurring through an imitation of God's mercy. Verhoeff further argues that through almsgiving, one is deified by imitating God's friendship to man.

38 *hom. in Heb.* 32.3 (PG 63, 223).

39 In the Greek, the verse reads: Γίνεσθε οἰκτῖρμονες καθὼς [καὶ] ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν οἰκτῖρμων ἐστίν. See B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C.M. Martini, and B.M. Metzger, eds. *The Greek New Testament*, 5th revised ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, American Bible Society, United Bible Societies, 2014).

40 Catherine Broc-Schmezer, "De l'aumône faite au pauvre à l'aumône du pauvre. Pauvreté et spiritualité chez Jean Chrysostome," 140.

41 It is clear that, in this passage, John has in mind showing mercy through almsgiving as he brings in the example of the widow who gave two mites in Mark 12:41–44 and Luke 21:1–4 to show that it is the disposition of the giver rather than the quantity given that makes one's offering acceptable.

42 See also Caner, *The Rich and the Pure*, 80–81, who discusses how, in John's thought, almsgiving was a means of humbling oneself in order to obtain the virtues of mercy and compassion. Caner also points out how this characteristic of John's teaching on almsgiving made him unique among his predecessors and contemporaries, such as Aphrahat and the Cappadocians.

which nourishes the plant of love: "I tell you, nothing is equal to almsgiving. So great is the strength of this practice whenever it is poured forth from pure reservoirs .... It is through this that the plant of love is sustained. For nothing is as accustomed to nourish love as being merciful."<sup>43</sup>

### 3 Benefits for Others

#### 3.1 *Alms Decrease the Suffering of Those Not in Heaven*

One of the most popular altruistic motivations for almsgiving was assisting the dead. The *Apostolic Constitutions* commands that during the Eucharist, prayers be offered on behalf of the dead for the forgiveness of their sins.<sup>44</sup> This same work also prescribes that alms be given from the deceased person's holdings as a memorial for her on the fortieth day after her death.<sup>45</sup> Although the *Constitutions* does not make any mention of these alms having power to atone for the dead person's sins, Augustine expresses his conviction that departed souls, which are neither "very bad" nor "very good," are assisted by the prayers of the faithful, the Eucharistic sacrifice, and alms given on their behalf.<sup>46</sup> John likewise mentions all of these practices as having power to provide some relief to Christians who have passed from this life.

In *hom. in Ac.* 21.3–4, he chides his members for wailing and making a public spectacle of themselves when mourning the dead. Not only does he deplore this custom because of its ostentatiousness, he also regards it as a waste of time. He surmises that it is inappropriate to mourn for those who have lived a virtuous life, for children, and for the newly baptized because the souls of these have been released and are *en route* to the Lord. For those who have not lived good lives, although it is indeed most appropriate to mourn for these, this mourning should be accompanied with prayer, almsgiving, and the Eucharistic sacrifice. John assures his audience that none of these works are useless:

43 PG 60, 175.

44 *Const. App.* 8.41 (SC 336, 256).

45 *Const. App.* 8.42 (SC 336, 258 and 260).

46 Augustine, *Enchir.* 29, 110 (CCSL 46, 108–109). Augustine explains that for souls who are very good, and therefore, are not in need of offerings on their behalf, alms can still act as a thank offering to God. For souls who are very bad, alms are of no assistance, except to comfort the living. For souls who are neither very bad nor very good, alms given on their behalf can either obtain complete forgiveness for their sins or make their damnation more bearable. See also Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 13.11 (CSEL 29, 92), in which he praises Pammachius for giving alms on behalf of his deceased wife and Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 106–107.

Many have benefited from the alms given by others on their behalf. For even if [the deliverance] is not complete, they have still found some comfort from them .... Not in vain are the offerings made on behalf of the departed, not in vain the prayers, not in vain the almsgiving. The Spirit has arranged all these things, desiring us to be aided through one another.<sup>47</sup>

John maintains, however, that alms given on behalf of the dead do not have the same value as the alms given by the deceased person prior to his death. In addition, alms must be given in proportion to the person's sins. John explains it in this way:

As he is liable for however many sins he has committed, the greater these are, the more necessary it is to give alms, not only on this account, but because the alms do not have the same strength now, but far less. For it is not equal to do it himself, and for another to do it on his behalf; therefore, as it is less, let us make it the greatest by giving in larger quantity.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, to have the same benefit, more alms must be given on someone's behalf than the alms given by oneself. It is doubtful, given John's emphasis elsewhere on giving according to one's ability, that he has a specific dollar amount in mind.<sup>49</sup> He is simply saying that one benefits more by doing a good deed, himself than if another performs a good deed on his behalf.<sup>50</sup>

In *hom. in Phil. 4*, John again expresses exasperation for the public displays of weeping and wailing for the dead. He instructs his listeners on what true mourning is: "Those public mournings are not out of sympathy, but from ostentation, ambition, and vanity. Many women do this as an art. Weep bitterly; groan at home, when no one sees you; this is sympathy."<sup>51</sup> He goes on to encourage his congregation to weep for those who did not give of their wealth when they were still alive. He does not bid his audience to stop there, however, as if there were no hope for these departed souls. He urges them, rather, to pray for such people and to incite others to pray for them and to give alms on their

47 PG 60, 169–170.

48 PG 60, 169.

49 See *hom. in Mt. 52* (PG 58, 523); *hom. in Jo. 33.3* (PG 59, 192); *De profectu evangelii/hom. in Phil. 1:18* (PG 51, 312); and *hom. in 1 Cor. 32.4* (PG 61, 270).

50 See also *hom. in Mt. 5.4–5* (PG 57, 59–60), where John warns his audience against depending too much on the prayers and mediation of the saints rather than working to obtain their own salvation and *hom. in 2 Cor. 20.3* (PG 61, 540), where the sacrifice of almsgiving speaks in the heavens on behalf of the donor.

51 Field, *hom. 4*, 36–37 = *hom. 3* in PG 62, 203.

behalf. "Let us weep for these; let us help them according to our power .... How and in what manner? By praying and exhorting others to pray for them, by continually giving to the poor on their behalf."<sup>52</sup>

As in *hom. in Ac.* 21, John talks of the great power of oblations made during the Eucharist on behalf of the dead, although in this passage, the Eucharistic prayers seem to be limited to those "who have passed on in faith."<sup>53</sup> As John makes clear that deceased catechumens are excluded from these prayers, it follows that non-believers could not enjoy these intercessions, either. While only deceased baptized believers seem to be eligible for mention in the Eucharistic prayers, John explains that catechumens who died before their baptism can be assisted through almsgiving. "And this [the Eucharistic sacrifice and prayers] is concerning those who have passed on in faith, but the catechumens are not even esteemed worthy of this consolation and are deprived of all aids except one. And what is this? It is possible to give to the poor on their behalf. This act provides some refreshment to them."<sup>54</sup> John does not go into greater detail on how almsgiving refreshes or comforts Christians or catechumens who have passed away—either here or elsewhere in his works. He does, however, provide an explanation for this economy of salvation. "God," he maintains "wishes us to be aided by each other."<sup>55</sup> He points to the example of Job who made sacrifices for his children in case they had sinned. According to John, Job did not worry about leaving property or land or some government office to his sons and daughters but sought to win for them favor from the Lord. John exhorts the members of his congregation likewise not to focus on obtaining earthly gifts, such as monuments or expensive grave clothes for their departed loved ones, but to procure for them grace and mercy at the hands of the Judge.

### 3.2 *Almsgiving Brings People Together*

John's claim in *hom. in Phil.* 4 that God wills that Christians mutually assist one another is related to another benefit he sees flowing from almsgiving. It draws people together by removing the separations and hindrances that economic disparity imposes. In addition, it attracts non-believers to the church who witness this display of generosity.

One of John's favorite passages from Scripture to illustrate how almsgiving binds people together is Acts 4:32–35. Although this passage refers specifically to the Christian community in Jerusalem, John seems to extend the application

52 Field, 37 = PG 62, 204.

53 Field, 38 = PG 62, 204.

54 Field, 37–38 = PG 62, 204.

55 Field, 38 = PG 62, 204.

to all of humanity. He first quotes Acts 4:32: “‘For, they were’ it says, ‘of one heart and one soul, and grace was upon them all.’” Then, he exclaims: “See the fruit of almsgiving, the barriers and hindrances were removed, and immediately their souls were joined together.”<sup>56</sup> Later in the homily, he alludes to the passage in the Gospels about the wide and narrow gates (Matt. 7:13–14; Luke 13:24). He goes into considerable detail regarding the wide loads that people carry, which prevent them from entering the narrow gate of heaven. These loads include: arrogance, a soul inflamed with passions, and “that load of thorns—wealth.”<sup>57</sup> These wide loads not only prevent one from entering through the narrow gate, but also prevent one from traveling among the crowd without striking others. If, on the other hand, people carry with them the achievements of virtues, they draw people to themselves rather than drive them away. Almsgiving, philanthropy, goodness, and meekness make up these virtues, which draw people near to oneself and allow easy passage through the narrow gate. John’s point in this context is that wealth tends to separate those who have it and those who do not, but sharing this wealth unites donors and recipients. This benefit, therefore, extends across the entire spectrum of society, whether the members are extremely wealthy, extremely poor, or somewhere in between.

John also uses the passage from Acts 4:32–35 to argue how the display of almsgiving by Christians attracts non-believing observers to the church. In *hom. in Ac.* 11.3, a passage often quoted by those wishing to present him as a social reformer, John lays out a simple proposal for ending poverty.<sup>58</sup> He estimates the number of Christians in the city to be 100,000 and the number of the poor in the city to be 50,000.<sup>59</sup> If all the Christians donated their gold to a common purse and if all ate their meals in common as in Acts 2 and Acts 4, there would be no poor or hungry person in the city. In this homily, John extols not just almsgiving, but living together in community. From a purely practical standpoint, he points out that living separately is much costlier than living with others. Expressing his admiration for the monastic life, he observes that none of those dwelling in monasteries ever suffered from hunger or want. The important point for the present topic, however, is that John explains that in addition

56 *hom. in Tit.* 6.3 (PG 62, 698).

57 PG 62, 699.

58 See Greeley, “St. John Chrysostom: Prophet of Social Justice,” 1166; Ritter, “Between ‘Theocracy’ and ‘Simple Life’: Dio Chrysostom, John Chrysostom, and the Problem of Humanizing Society,” 174–176; and Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 136–137.

59 The series *Homiliae in Acta Apostolorum* has traditionally been dated to Constantinople, but this particular homily is of uncertain provenance. See Mayer, *Provenance*, 267, 406–407, and 534.

to relieving poverty, this pooling of resources and outpouring of generosity by Christians would cause others in the city to want to become Christians.

How much grace do you think there would be? For, if then, when there was no believer, but only the three thousand and the five thousand, when all throughout the world were enemies, when they could expect no comfort from anywhere, they ventured into this task so boldly, how much more would this be the case now, when by the grace of God there are believers everywhere throughout the world? What gentile would remain? For my part, I think there would be none; we would so attract all and draw them to us.<sup>60</sup>

Although John is not speaking exclusively of almsgiving, but also of living in community, he does not just have in mind the Christians sharing their resources with one another. He is describing what would happen if the 100,000 Christians in the city pooled their wealth to provide for the 50,000 poor people in the city. Again, this is not just a benefit for the Christian community, but for the entire city. Almsgiving, in this case, would unite the entire city as well as convert all its inhabitants to Christianity.<sup>61</sup> John, because he is trying to elicit generosity in his auditors, does not mention the inevitable consequence that some people would and already were coming to church simply to seek hand-outs. Although he is speaking in idealistic terms, however, it is not unfathomable that some non-Christians who were fairly well-off might be attracted to Christianity on account of its concern for the less fortunate members of society.

#### 4 Conclusion

As I have demonstrated, John believes that almsgiving's efficacy extends beyond its ability to deal with sin. Almsgiving has many other benefits, particu-

60 PG 60, 97–98.

61 See also Basil of Caesarea, *reg. fus.* 19.1 (PG 31, 968); *ep.* 295 (Y. Courtonne, ed. *Lettres* III [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1957], 170; and *In tempore famis et siccitatis/hom.* 8.8 (old numbering) and 325.8 (new numbering) (PG 31, 325), who likewise frequently refers to the Christian community in Acts 2 and 4 as an example for both his monks and his entire congregation. In the last reference, he urges the members of his flock to imitate the three-thousand “where all things were common to them—life, soul, concourse, a common table, undivided kinship—where unfeigned love made many bodies into one and joined different souls into a singleness of mind.”



larly for the donor. It is a way to be remembered by posterity and to build a reputation for oneself as a generous and kind person in contrast to someone who spent his life amassing wealth and building edifices, only to be remembered by future generations as greedy and exploitative. Almsgiving is also an investment that pays dividends both in this life and the next, making God indebted not only to the donor, but also, to the donor's children. It increases the effectiveness of one's prayers and fasts. In fact, almsgiving is absolutely necessary in order for one's fasts and prayers to possess merit before God. One must hear the cry of the poor if he desires to be heard by God, and fasting without almsgiving is simply cruel. Finally, almsgiving does not merely expunge the debt of sin, but has a transformative effect on the soul. It heals vices, gives one the proper attitude toward wealth, forms good habits, nourishes virtue, and even makes humans like God. While John mostly focuses on the benefits of almsgiving for donors, he also maintains that almsgiving can be done on behalf of others, such as deceased baptized believers and catechumens. In addition, almsgiving creates solidarity not only within the body of Christ, but also within the larger society. When an entire Christian community participates in almsgiving by pooling its resources, it even compels unbelievers who witness this outpouring of generosity to become Christians, themselves.

## Almsgiving as a Penance for the Capital Sins of Adultery, Murder, and Apostasy

As I demonstrated in chapter two, one of the main arguments John employs to motivate his congregants to give alms is to stress almsgiving's ability to eradicate their post-baptismal sin. He even goes so far as to say that there "is no sin which alms cannot cleanse."<sup>1</sup> While other early Christians such as Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine also emphasize almsgiving's efficacy in dealing with post-baptismal sin, none of the above three claimed that almsgiving was able to forgive *every* sin. Augustine does indicate in *de fide et operibus* that there were some who maintained that almsgiving was sufficient to deal with all sins, except murder, adultery, and idolatry.<sup>2</sup> These three sins were known as the "capital sins,"<sup>3</sup> and in many regions in the fourth century, were dealt with through long sentences and/or very public forms of ecclesiastical penance.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, there is no evidence that such a strict form of public penance was in place either in Antioch or Constantinople during John's respective tenures in those cities.<sup>5</sup> In fact, both Socrates and Sozomen recount that in Con-

1 *hom. in Ac.* 25.3 (PG 60, 196).

2 Augustine, *Fid. et op.* 19.34 (CSEL 41, 79–80).

3 These sins were variously referred to as the sins unto death (*ad mortem*), mortal (*mortalia/mortifera*), capital (*capitalia*), criminal (*crimina*), and incurable (*ἀνίατα*). See Joseph Tixeront, *History of Dogmas, Volume 2: From St. Athanasius to St. Augustine (318–430)*, trans. H.L.B. (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1914), 319; Gregory J. Lombardo, *St. Augustine On Faith and Works*, trans. and annotated by Gregory J. Lombardo, Ancient Christian Writers (New York: The Newman Press, 1988), 94, note 185; and Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed., 217 and 439.

4 By "ecclesiastical penance," I mean penance that in some way required the mediation of the church community as a whole versus penance only involving the penitent and priest/spiritual director or the penitent and God.

5 Oscar D. Watkins, *A History of Penance: Being a Study of the Authorities*. Vol. 1, *For the whole Church to A. D. 450*. (New York: Longmans, 1920), 330. (Hereafter, abbreviated as *A History of Penance*). Although this work is dated, for a comprehensive treatment of ecclesiastical penance up to the second half of the fifth century, it has yet to be surpassed. See also Alexis Torrance's evaluation of the work in *Repentance in Late Antiquity*, 13. Although, in Antioch, John excluded sinners from the assembly to motivate them to do penance and from the Eucharist because he did not want the body and blood of the Lord profaned, these acts of exclusion were not part of the penance, itself or what atoned for or healed the person's sins. On the contrary, John taught that the Eucharist was a way to atone for one's sins; therefore, he

stantinople, the office of the priest who oversaw penance was abolished in 391, and from that point, people were simply to partake or refrain from communion as their consciences allowed.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, John had relative freedom in deciding how to treat grave sins, but his expressed distaste for public confession and ostentatious forms of penance and his view of the unnecessary of long penances meant he needed some other means for expiating these sins.

Although John had a reputation for leniency, as a pastor, he took sin seriously and continuously sought the full conversion of his parishioners. He saw himself as a physician of souls and wanted to offer remedies that would heal the effects of sin in his members. While almsgiving was not the only form of repentance he suggested for addressing post-baptismal sin, his strong and exclusive claims regarding almsgiving's sin-erasing capacity suggest this was his preferred remedy for serious sins. I argue, therefore, in this chapter that John used almsgiving as a penance for even the capital sins of murder, adultery, and apostasy.

In order to demonstrate this thesis, I will begin by laying out the available evidence for how serious sins were dealt with in other regions of the empire during the second half of the fourth and first half of the fifth century. Then, I will argue why it is unlikely that such a practice existed in Antioch during John's priesthood and, especially, during his episcopacy in Constantinople and that he was opposed to such practices throughout his clerical career. Finally, I will discuss John's views on what repentance should entail, including the roles played by the church and priests and his statements discussed in chapter two about the ability of almsgiving to cleanse every sin, the latter of which imply that sinners could wipe away even the capital sins of murder, adultery, and apostasy through almsgiving.

## 1 The Penitential System in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries in Cappadocia, Alexandria, and the West

From the Council of Nicaea in 325 and onward, the church accepted back into her fold even capital offenders. Canon 13 of the Council of Nicaea states that at the approach of death, no sinner should be deprived of the Eucharist. If,

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had no desire to deprive his congregants of this life-saving remedy. See *hom. in Mt.* 4.8 (PG 57, 50), where John speaks of the Eucharist as "able to extinguish every disease [i.e. sin] (*πάσαν νόσον σβέσαι δύνησεται*)," terminology he also employs when speaking of almsgiving. John was, however, careful to guard against people partaking of the Eucharist in an unrepentant state. See *Philogon./anom.* 6 (PG 48, 754–755).

6 Socrates, *h.e.* 5.19 (GCS n.s. 1, 293–294); Sozomen, *h.e.* 7.16 (GCS n.s. 4, 322–324).

however, the sick person recovered, he or she was to be assigned a place with those who participated in the Prayers only.<sup>7</sup> This practice of reconciling all classes of sinners before their deaths had not been widespread until the days following the Decian persecution, and even then, many sided with the Novatianists in not readmitting the lapsed into communion.<sup>8</sup> According to Cyprian, Novatian had encouraged capital sinners, including the lapsed, to perform penance, but withheld absolution, even at the point of death.<sup>9</sup> In Spain, the Council of Iliberris (306), had ruled that idolaters, most classes of murderers, and those who had committed adultery a second time after performing penance could not be reconciled to the church even on their deathbeds.<sup>10</sup> The Council of Nicaea ended this rigorism, at least, in theory. Canon 8 required the Novatianists or “καθαρτοί,” as they called themselves, to communicate with those who had lapsed under persecution and who had married a second time after their spouses had died.<sup>11</sup>

Another interesting feature of the canons of Nicaea is that they take for granted the various grades of penance, such as the “Hearers (ἀκροωμένοις),” “Kneelers (ὑποπεσούνται),” and those admitted to the “Prayers.” The Hearers were allowed to be present for the scripture readings and homily but had to remain in the narthex. The Kneelers were permitted to kneel in the nave, and those admitted to the Prayers were allowed to be present for all parts of the liturgy, except the offering and Eucharist.<sup>12</sup> Canon 11 provides a good illustration of the various grades. It prescribes that those who had lapsed during Licinius’ persecution, were to remain among the Hearers for three years, among the Kneelers for seven years, and then among those who took part

7 See Norman Tanner, ed.; Original text by G. Alberigo et. al. in consultation with H. Jedin, *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 13.

8 Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 274–275, 280, and 482.

9 Cyprian, *Ep.* 55, 28 (CSEL 3.2, 646). See also Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 214.

10 Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 275–280. The date of this council is disputed. Watkins estimates that it was held in 306, but a note that accompanies the acts of the council states that it was held in 324. Watkins, however, provides several convincing reasons for fixing the date at 306, and if he is correct, one of the purposes of the council may have been what to do with those who had lapsed in Diocletian’s persecution (303–305).

11 See Tanner, *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, 9–10.

12 See Basil, *ep.* 199, can. 22 and *ep.* 217, can. 56 (Y. Courtonne, ed. *Lettres* 11 [Paris: *Les Belles Lettres*, 1961], 158, 210–211). See also Bernard Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*, trans. Francis Courtney (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 90–91. Originally published as *Buße und Ölung*, *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, vol. IV, part 3 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1951).

in the Prayers without oblation (χωρίς προσφορᾶς κοινωνήσουσι τῷ λαῷ τῶν προσευχῶν) for another two years.<sup>13</sup>

Although this graded system, possibly introduced by Gregory Thaumaturgas, appears to have been practiced in Asia Minor since the Council of Ancyra in 314 CE, there is no evidence apart from the canons of Nicaea that this system ever existed in the West, either before or after the Council.<sup>14</sup> There is also no evidence that it existed in either Antioch or Constantinople. It thus appears that in the fourth century, although it was generally agreed upon that those who had committed capital sins could be reconciled to the church, there was no uniform system of ecclesiastical penance throughout the Christian empire. Not only did the outward form of penance differ from one location to another, but the duration of penance prescribed for certain sins and the frequency with which the discipline could be administered varied as well.

### 1.1 *The Performance of Penance*

Regarding the performance of penance, it appears to have been of a very public nature in some places, such as Rome, Milan, and Cappadocia. The *Liber Pontificalis*, a record of the popes, compiled about 514 CE, states that Pope Marcellus (307–309) established twenty-five titles (*titulos*) or districts (*quasi diocesis*) in Rome “on account of the baptism and penance of the many people who were being converted from the pagans, and on account of the tombs of the martyrs.”<sup>15</sup> It seems that one priest was appointed for each of the twenty-five districts, who was responsible for preparing catechumens for baptism, hearing the confessions of penitents and overseeing their penance, and caring for the tombs of the martyrs. Although confession to these priests, as well as the assignment of some suitable penance appears to have occurred privately, those admitted to penance were required to sit apart from the faithful in the liturgy and were not allowed to partake of the Eucharist.

Sozomen’s account of the Roman penance practiced in his day, in the mid-fifth century CE, is noteworthy here, both because he contrasts it with the practice of Constantinople in the late fourth century and because he maintains that the Roman bishops had preserved this practice “from old time (ἀρχαῖον).”<sup>16</sup>

13 Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, 11.

14 For a summary of the grades of penitents in Gregory Thaumaturgas, see *ep. can.* 11 (PG 10, 1048); and Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 239–240, who comments that although this canon may have been added by someone after Gregory, the grades were established by the time of the Council of Ancyra in 314 CE.

15 *Lib. Pont.*, 1 (Louis Duchesne, ed. [Paris: E. Thorin, 1955], 164).

16 Sozomen, *h.e.* 7.16.7 (GCS n.s. 4, 323).

According to his telling, at some specified time before the Eucharist, the penitents wailed and cast themselves prostrate on the ground while the clergy and laity wept with them. The bishop would then raise up each of the penitents, pray over them as a group, and dismiss them from the assembly ahead of the faithful.<sup>17</sup>

From the fourth century, Jerome recounts in a letter the penance of Fabiola, a prominent Roman lady, that is consistent with Sozomen's description of the very public nature of this act. Fabiola had divorced her first husband due to his grave vices and had not incurred any condemnation on account of this. While her first husband was still alive, however, she married again. Although it does not appear that she understood at the time of her remarriage that she was committing any sin, on the death of her second husband, she voluntarily chose to undergo public penance. In her case, it appears that her penance and reconciliation both took place on the same day, on the Thursday before Easter.<sup>18</sup> In a letter to Oceanus, Jerome gives a striking description of the depths to which Fabiola stooped in communicating her remorse.

She put on sackcloth, her fault being publicly acknowledged; and with the whole city of Rome looking on ....she stood in the order of the penitents, the bishop, the presbyters, and all the people weeping with her, and submitted with disheveled hair, a sallow face, squalid hands, and a sordid neck. What sins may this weeping not purge away? .... Her face, by which she had pleased that second husband, she chastised; she hated gems, she could not bear to look at fine linen, she fled from ornaments. She grieved in such sort as if she had committed adultery, and she desired to heal that one wound by great expenditure of remedies.<sup>19</sup>

This passage demonstrates that there was an order of penitents (*ordine paenitentium*) in Rome at this time. It also indicates that weeping was part of the penitential act and was regarded as a key method of wiping away the sin. Pope Innocent (402–417) in a letter to Decentius, Bishop of Eugubium (modern-day Gubbio, Italy), states that the weeping of the penitent was to be taken into consideration by the priest in determining the gravity of the sin and a suitable

17 Sozomen, *h.e.* 7.16.5–7 (GCS n.s. 4, 323).

18 James Dallen, *The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 70–71, explains that Fabiola was not part of the order of penitents, but took her place with them on this day only.

19 Jerome, *ep.* 77.4–5 (Labourt, ed. *Lettres*, vol. 4, 43–45).

duration of penance.<sup>20</sup> It appears, therefore, that weeping was both a means of atoning for sin and a sign of contrition that the priest looked for when deciding how to deal with the penitent. This passage also indicates that, in addition to weeping, the voluntary, public humiliation was a key part of the penance, and thus, also, one of the remedies for sin.

In Milan, Ambrose states in his treatise on penance that while a person is undergoing penance, in addition to abstention from the Eucharist, he should drink no wine, not aspire to public office, limit his sleep, abstain from marital pleasures, and pray with groaning.<sup>21</sup> In addition, there is the well-known example of Ambrose imposing penance on the emperor, Theodosius. According to Sozomen, the emperor had ordered the massacre that resulted in the death of 7,000 inhabitants of Thessalonika after some in the city had killed his general, Butheric. Ambrose condemned this action in a letter to Theodosius and informed him that he would withhold communion from him until he had done public penance. The emperor submitted to Ambrose's sentence, publicly confessing his sin and refraining from wearing his imperial ornaments during his time of penance.<sup>22</sup> This element of public confession of sins is interesting as in Rome and North Africa, the practice seems to have been private confession to a priest.<sup>23</sup>

In Cappadocia, there was a graded system of penance, consisting of the Mourners, the Hearers, the Kneelers, and the Standers.<sup>24</sup> The Mourners had to stand outside the church, weeping, confessing their sins, and supplicating those entering to pray on their behalf. The Hearers were allowed to be present for the scripture readings and homily, but had to remain in the narthex. The Kneelers were allowed to kneel in the nave and the Standers to stand, but both groups were required to leave before the Eucharist.<sup>25</sup> There was at least one exception, however. Adulteresses were to perform penance privately as public exposure could result in their deaths.<sup>26</sup> In Alexandria, other than being

20 Innocent, *ep.* 25.7 (PL 20, 559).

21 Ambrose, *Paen.*, 2.10.96 (OOSA 17, 276).

22 See Sozomen, 7.25 (GCS n.s. 4, 339), and Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 317–330, especially 327.

23 See Innocent, *ep.* 25.7 (PL 20, 559). Augustine indicates in *Serm.* 352 (PL 39, 1558) and *Symb.* 7.15 (CCSL 46, 198) that those observing penitents had no precise knowledge of the latter's sins, even though they could assume that their sins were grave.

24 See Basil of Caesarea, *ep.* 188, *ep.* 199, and *ep.* 217.

25 See Basil, *ep.* 199, can. 22 and *ep.* 217, can. 56. See also Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*, 90–91.

26 See Basil of Caesarea, *ep.* 199, can. 34 (Y. Courtonne, ed. *Lettres* II, 161). See also Watkins, *A History of Penance* I, 259.

excluded from communion, those who had lapsed were expected to perform penance privately through prayer and fasting.<sup>27</sup>

Canon 77 of the *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, a collection of African canons, many of which have been dated to the first half of the fifth century, state that penitents were required to kneel during the liturgy, even on “days of remission,” and canon 76 of the same collection instructs that penitents are responsible for burying the dead.<sup>28</sup>

## 1.2 *Duration of Penance and Prohibitions Following Penance*

Regarding the duration of penance, the terms for particular sins were not very specific in the West. In Rome, the letter of Pope Siricius (384–398) to Bishop Himerius of Tarragona indicates that apostates are not to be reconciled until impending death, but terms are not specified for other sins.<sup>29</sup> From the letter by Pope Innocent to Decentius, it appears that this was left to the discretion of the bishop. In any case, Innocent’s letter indicates that there was a distinction made between graver and lighter sins (*sive ex gravioribus commissis, sive ex levioribus*).<sup>30</sup> The graver sins presumably referred to the three capital sins and the lesser to sins that were serious, but not as significant as the capital sins.<sup>31</sup> In North Africa, Augustine specifies that the duration of penance was to be determined by the bishop in accordance with the gravity of the sin.<sup>32</sup>

In Neo-Caesarea in Cappadocia, Basil’s canons (374–375) specify fifteen years for adultery, twenty years for intentional homicide, and a lifetime for denying Christ; however, the bishop could shorten the penitential period based

27 See Peter of Alexandria, *ep. can.*, can. 1 (Joannou, ed., *Discipline générale antique (iv–vi s.)*, vol. 2, 33–34). See also Tim Vivian, *St. Peter of Alexandria: Bishop and Martyr* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 185–192, for a good English commentary on Peter’s letter and 180–185 for a convincing argument against earlier scholars who maintained that Peter’s letter provides evidence of a graded penitential system in Alexandria during the early fourth century; and Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 280–282.

28 *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, canons 76 and 77 in Germaine Morin, ed. *Caesarius of Arles, Opera Omnia* 11 (Abbaye de Maredsous: Maretio, 1937), 94. For the dating of the *Stat. Eccl. Ant.*, see Charles Joseph Hefele, *History of the Councils of the Church: From the Original Documents*, Vol. 2: AD 325–429, trans. and ed. William R. Clark (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1876), 410 (Originally published as *Conciliengeschichte: nach den Quellen bearbeitet* [Freiburg: Herder, 1875]) and Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 447–448.

29 Siricius, *Ad Himerium* 3 (PL 13, 1136).

30 Innocent, *ep.* 25.7 (PL 20, 559).

31 Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 415.

32 Augustine, *Serm.* 351 (PL 39, 1545); *Codex Canonum Ecclesiae Africanae*, canon 43 (Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova, et amplissima collection* 111 [Paris: H. Welter, 1901], 735).



on the degree of contrition displayed by the penitent.<sup>33</sup> Gregory of Nyssa (335–395 CE) prescribes nine years for fornication, eighteen years for adultery, and twenty-seven years for intentional homicide, but again, the bishop was free to shorten the sentence based upon the fervor and remorse of the penitent.<sup>34</sup> In the patriarchate of Alexandria in the fourth century, it appears that specific penances are assigned only for those who had lapsed during Diocletian's persecution. The sentences could range from forty days to three–four years.<sup>35</sup>

The letter of Pope Siricius to Himerius discusses various prohibitions for those who have completed their formal penance. Those who have undergone penance may not serve in the military, marry, or attend the circus games. Those who were already married prior to committing their sin may not have sexual intercourse with their spouses. If after reconciliation, a person fails to observe these prohibitions, he may not be admitted to penance a second time, but is allowed to take part in the liturgy, except for receiving the Eucharist. He may not receive the Eucharist until at the point of death.<sup>36</sup>

In Rome and Cappadocia, clerics who had committed one of the capital sins did not perform penance, but were permanently demoted to laymen.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in Rome and North Africa, laymen who had done penance were barred from ecclesiastical office.<sup>38</sup>

### 1.3 *Frequency of Penance*

In most places in the West during the fourth and fifth centuries, the evidence suggests that a person could only perform public penance once during his or her lifetime. Pope Siricius specifies that those who have committed apos-

33 For the length of penance specified for adultery, intentional homicide, and apostasy, see *ep.* 217, canons 58, 56, and 73. For the freedom of the bishop to shorten the penance based on the degree of contrition manifested by the penitent, see *ep.* 217, canons 74 and 84 (Y. Courtonne, ed. *Lettres* II, 210–211, 213, 216–217).

34 Gregory of Nyssa, *ep. can.*, edited by Ekkehardus Mühlenberg in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 3/5 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 6–9.

35 See Peter of Alexandria, *ep. can.*, esp. canons 1, 5, 6 and 7 (Périclès-Pierre, Joannou, ed. *Discipline générale antique (iv–vi s.). Les canons des pères grecs*, vol. 2, Pontificia Commissione per la redazione del codice di diritto canonico orientale. Series 1, vol. ix. [Rome: Tipographia Italo-Orientale, 1963], 33–34, 38–41). At the time Peter wrote his letter, it appears that those who had sacrificed to the gods after being tortured had already undergone penance for three years. Peter imposes on these only an additional forty days of penance, presumably, from the context, the forty days of Lent, which are about to begin. Watkins, *A History of Penance* I, 280, dates the epistle to 306 CE.

36 *Ad Himerium*, 5 (PL 13, 1137).

37 See *Ad Himerium* 14 (PL 13, 1145); Basil, *ep.* 199, canon 32 (Courtonne, ed. *Lettres* II, 161).

38 See *Ad Himerium* 14 (PL 13, 1145); Augustine, *ep.* 185.45 (CSEL 57, 39).

tasy may only undertake penance once, and are not to be reconciled to the church until at the point of death.<sup>39</sup> In Milan, Ambrose specifies that a person may undergo public penance only once during his/her lifetime.<sup>40</sup> In Spain, the Third Council of Toledo in 589 still prohibited sinners from undergoing public penance a second time.<sup>41</sup>

From a letter of Macedonius to Augustine in 414 CE, it is evident that in North Africa, only one penance in a lifetime was granted to those who had committed one of the capital sins.<sup>42</sup> Augustine teaches, however, that even though the church does not admit second-time offenders to ecclesiastical penance, there is still hope that God will grant them pardon after death, provided they demonstrate sincere repentance. "And in the church, for whomever it may be, that place of penance is not conceded; yet God is not forgetful of his patience toward them .... Therefore, the mercy of God is so great, the patience of God toward sinners is so great, that if their behavior is amended in this temporal life, they are not damned eternally."<sup>43</sup> This means that even if a person was not re-admitted to ecclesiastical penance and formally reconciled to the church, he was still encouraged to perform acts of repentance in an effort to reform his life and obtain God's forgiveness.

Although the policy of one penance appears to have been operative in Alexandria during the third century, there is no record of limiting those who had committed grave sins to only one penance in the fourth-century East.<sup>44</sup>

39 Siricius, *Ad Himerium* 3 (PL 13, 1136).

40 Ambrose, *Paen.* 2.10.95 (OOSA 17, 276).

41 Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 481.

42 Macedonius, *Ep. ad Augustinum* (152.2 in Augustine's letters) (CSEL 44, 394).

43 Augustine, *ep.* 153.7–8 (CSEL 44, 402, 404). Hillner, *Prison, Punishment, and Penance in Late Antiquity*, 85, summarizes Augustine's position regarding repeated penance in this same letter thus: "People could be cast out, but in this life they had to be given the chance to be readmitted, even as often as necessary. If they wanted to perform penance again, God may still show mercy." If Hillner is referring to readmission into the church assembly, she is correct, but if she means readmission to ecclesiastical penance, she is mistaken. Augustine is clear here that the church only allowed people to perform public, ecclesiastical penance once. He did, however, grant that people could and should be encouraged to perform penance on their own accord to attempt to atone for their sins and to amend their souls.

44 For third-century witnesses of one penance in Alexandria, see Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 2.13 (GCS 52, 143–145) and Origen, *hom. in Lev.* 15.2 (SC 287, 256). Both Bernard Poschmann and J.N.D. Kelly only provide solid evidence that the principle of one penance was maintained in the West and use the accusations brought against John at the Synod of the Oak and in Socrates *h. e.* 6.21 concerning the frequency with which he allowed sinners to do penance as their only proof that this practice existed in the Eastern churches. See

### 1.4 *Summary*

It thus appears that throughout the West, a person could only perform penance once in a lifetime for the three capital sins of murder, adultery, and apostasy. Penance was also of a very public nature in Rome with the penitents, clergy, and congregants weeping to atone for their own sins or the sins of their weaker members. Likewise, in Milan, prominent members who had sinned gravely might even publicly confess their sins before the church. In Cappadocia, there appears to be four grades of penitents, including Mourners who stood outside the church, confessing their sins and imploring those entering to intercede for them with God. Similarly, in Cappadocia, the duration of penance for sins like murder and adultery could range from fifteen–twenty-seven years. In the West, although the sentences were usually determined by the bishop in accordance with the gravity of the sin and the degree of contrition expressed by the penitent, people who had apostatized might not be reconciled until death, and the prohibitions following penance were very severe and could last a lifetime. Although the canons regulating penance were sometimes so severe that they were difficult to enforce, the attitude in many places was that serious sins could only be atoned for through many tears and much time, labor, and humiliation.<sup>45</sup>

## 2 *The Penitential System in Syria in the Third and Fourth Centuries*

There is no evidence that a graded penitential system, such as that attested in Cappadocia, ever existed in Antioch.<sup>46</sup> Although this system is prescribed by the Council of Ancyra in 314 CE and one of the three extant lists of bishops present at the council includes Vitalis of Antioch, all of these lists are of

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Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*, 104 and note 178; and Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed., 438. See Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 429, who points out the lack of evidence for the limitation of one penance in the East. Herbert Vorgrimler, *Buße und Krankensalbung* Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte IV, Faszikel 3 (Freiburg: Herder, 1978), 73, whose work has superseded that of Poschmann, and Dallen, *The Reconciling Community*, 62–63, maintain that the limitation of one penance was practiced in the Western churches during the fourth and fifth centuries but do not comment on the practice of the Eastern churches.

45 See Dallen, *The Reconciling Community*, 75, who supplies a quotation from Pope Siricius (*ep.* 1.5 [PL 13, 1130–1131]), complaining of people not observing the prohibitions following penance on abstaining from sexual relations, not aspiring to public office, and refraining from recreation.

46 Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 330.

doubtful authenticity.<sup>47</sup> The Council of Nicaea in 325 CE also mentions grades of penitents, but there is no evidence that this system ever took root in Antioch, Constantinople, Palestine, or anywhere in the West.<sup>48</sup> Following the Decian persecution, the Council of Antioch in 252 CE had ruled that the church did have authority to remit even capital sins, but makes no mention of grades of penitents.

The *Didascalia*, thought to be of Syrian provenance with the bulk of the material having been redacted during the third century CE, possibly, even prior to Decian's persecution, provides several details regarding the procedure of penance.<sup>49</sup> The document states clearly that the bishop has received authority from Christ to loose and to bind sins, including those of idolatry and adultery.<sup>50</sup> After a sinner had expressed the desire to be reconciled, the bishop was first to cast her out of the assembly. After some unspecified period during which the sinner was banned from the assembly, the faithful then interceded for the sinner, and the bishop called her back in and asked if she were repentant. Provided the bishop was convinced of the sinner's contrition, he received her back into the church. The bishop then assigned a penance consisting of two, three, five, or seven weeks of fasting. As no duration is specified for these successive

47 See Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte*, vol. 1, iii, § 18 (Freiburg: Herder, 1873), 220, cited in Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 284.

48 For mention of the grades of penitents, see canons 11, 12, and 14 of the Council of Nicaea in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, 11–13. See Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 284, for the lack of evidence of a graded penitential system in all of these named regions; and Robert Barringer, "Ecclesiastical Penance in the Church of Constantinople: A Study of Hagiographical Evidence to 983 A.D." (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford), 1980, 32 and 52, who comments on the silence of the hagiographical sources regarding any stages of ecclesiastical penance in Constantinople prior to 451 CE.

49 See Alistair Stewart-Sykes, ed. *The Didascalia Apostolorum: An English Version edited, introduced and annotated by Alistair Stewart-Sykes*, *Studia Traditionis Theologiae*, Explorations in Early and Medieval Theology 1 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2009), 22–55, esp. 54, who dates the final redaction to the first quarter of the fourth century, but dates the work of the "uniting redactor," whom he claims is primarily responsible for the present version of the *Didascalia*, to the first quarter of the third century. See also Berthold Altaner and Alfred Stuiber, *Patrologie: Leben, Schriften, and Lehre der Kirchenväter* (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1966), 84 f.; O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte alterkirchlichen Literatur* 11 (Freiburg: Herder, 1913–1932), 304 ff.; and Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 247–248, who date the work to the third century. R.H. Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum. The Syriac Version Translated and Accompanied by the Verone Latin Fragments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), xc1; and P. Galtier, "La date de la Didascale," *Revue d'histoire ecclesiastique* 42 (1947): 315–351, both date the work prior to Decian's persecution, but still not before the third century CE.

50 *Didasc.* 7 (CSCO 401, 407), 87–93.

actions, it seems as if this process occurred all during the same day.<sup>51</sup> During the time of penance, the sinner was to weep and make supplications and was not allowed to partake of the Eucharist or to participate in the Eucharistic prayers, but was allowed to hear the Scriptures and homily.<sup>52</sup> After the completion of the assigned penance, the faithful prayed for the sinner, and she was formally reconciled by the laying on of hands by the bishop and permitted to partake of communion.<sup>53</sup>

Regarding the frequency with which penance could be repeated, the document specifies that a person who had caused contention within the church was to be excommunicated permanently on the second offense. After a possible allusion to Titus 3:9–11, in which instructions are given for how to deal with a divisive person, the text of the *Didascalia* reads: “Indeed, when that one is cast out twice from the church, he is justly cut off, and the church is much brighter in her constitution, because there is peace in her ... because from that hour the church abides without blasphemy and commotion.”<sup>54</sup> This appears to be a difference from the practices in Rome, Milan, North Africa, and Spain during the second half of the fourth century, where a person was cut off from the church only if she committed any of the capital sins a second time after undergoing formal penance. It is not clear, however, if any of the Syrian churches actually dealt with divisive church members in this manner.

The *Apostolic Constitutions*, the first six books of which are thought to be based on the *Didascalia*, is another work of probable Syrian provenance that also includes regulations for ecclesiastical penance. Scholars generally estimate that the document was compiled between 375–400 CE.<sup>55</sup> As most of the material in the *Apostolic Constitutions* on the procedure for penance is contained in Book 2, it is not surprising that it is nearly identical with that in the *Didascalia*. The penitent is first cast out while the congregation intercedes for him in prayer. After he has demonstrated the “fruits of repentance,” he is brought back into the church and questioned by the bishop regarding his remorse, assigned a period of two–seven weeks of fasting in accordance with his offense, and following the completion of his penance, is formally recon-

51 Ibid. 6, 72.

52 Ibid. 10, 118–119.

53 Ibid. 10, 120.

54 Ibid. 10, 125.

55 See Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ancient Church Orders*, Joint Liturgical Studies 80 (Norwich, Norfolk, UK: Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2015), 93, who claims that most scholars agree on a date of 375–380. See also Altaner and Stuiber, 255 f., who date it to 375 CE. F.X. Funk, ed. *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* 1 (Paderborn: Schoeningh, 1905), XIX, however, dates it to 400 CE.

ciled through the imposition of the bishop's hands while the faithful pray for him.<sup>56</sup> As in the *Didascalia*, no specific timeframe is given for these events, but enough time must have passed for the person to have demonstrated sincere repentance. Presumably, this would be a period of weeks, or at most, months. The *Apostolic Constitutions* also permits the bishop to excommunicate permanently one who persists in his sin and has become entirely corrupt.<sup>57</sup> Due to its close similarity with the *Didascalia*, this material from the *Apostolic Constitutions* relating to penance is most certainly from the third century. In material thought to have been added by the compiler in *Const. App.* 8.9, however, liturgical prayers are prescribed for those undergoing penance, after which the penitents were to exit the church.<sup>58</sup> This suggests that there was still a formal class of penitents within the Syrian church during the late fourth century.

The *Apostolic Canons*, which are appended to the *Apostolic Constitutions*, are thought to have been collected no earlier than the compilation of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, that is, no earlier than the second half of the fourth century. Some of the canons, however, are derived from the Councils of Nicaea (325 CE), Antioch (341 CE), and possibly, of Laodicea (360 CE).<sup>59</sup> These canons mention as the penalty for several sins either suspension from the assembly or, in the case of more serious sins of the clergy, being stripped of one's office.<sup>60</sup> These are the only penalties mentioned, and they are applied to sins as minor as leaving the assembly prior to the Eucharist and not fasting on the prescribed days and as severe as raping an unbetrothed virgin, committing unpremeditated murder, and denying Christ.<sup>61</sup> Oddly, canon 24 is the only one that specifies a duration for the punishment: three years' exclusion from the assembly for a layman who has castrated himself.<sup>62</sup> Presumably, the terms would be longer for more serious sins, such as rape, murder, and apostasy, but the canons are silent regarding

56 *Const. App.* 2.16; 2.18 (SC 320, 184 and 186; SC 320, 192 and 194).

57 *Const. App.* 2.41.7–9 (SC 320, 274 and 276). Although the bishop could excommunicate a person permanently if he thought him or her to be so sinful as to be beyond cure, this excommunication was not the penalty for any one particular sin. It is thus not equivalent to the rule of only one penance as practiced in Rome, North, Africa, Milan, and Spain.

58 SC 336, 162–166.

59 Watkins, *A History of Penance* 1, 347.

60 See canons 6–13, 23–25, 28–32, 36–37, 42–60, 62–73, 76, 81, and 83–84 (SC 336, 276–306).

61 See canon 10 (SC 336, 276–278) for leaving the assembly early; canon 69 (SC 336, 300) for not fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays; 67 and 66 (SC 336, 300) for rape and murder; and 62 (SC 336, 298) for denying Christ.

62 SC 336, 280. Canons 21–24 are based on canon 1 from the Council of Nicaea, but the latter canon does not mention any punishment for a layman who has voluntarily castrated himself other than that he is barred from becoming a cleric. See Norman Tanner, *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, 6.

the lengths of sentences for other crimes. Furthermore, the three-year term for self-castration seems to contradict the terms of two-seven weeks of fasting that the *Didascalia* and *Apostolic Constitutions* appear to prescribe for all sins. Other than John himself, the *Apostolic Canons* and parts of the *Apostolic Constitutions* are the only surviving material regarding ecclesiastical penance in Syria during the second half of the fourth century.<sup>63</sup>

It appears that in Syria during the third and fourth centuries, rather than grades of penitents, as in Cappadocia, there were two classes of sinners—those who were cast out of the church either temporarily or permanently and those who were allowed to be present for the scripture readings and homily, but were required to leave before the Eucharist. This first class, however, unlike the Mourners in Cappadocia who sometimes had to supplicate for years, was only barred from entering the church until the bishop could be sure of their remorse and repentance. Also, the sentences of the second class of sinners, who had been admitted to penance, only lasted from two to seven weeks, unlike in Cappadocia, where the sentences could last as long as fifteen and twenty years. It thus appears that the system of ecclesiastical penance in Syria was not nearly as stringent as that in Cappadocia during the fourth century, with the main difference being that lapsed Christians in Syria were not required to undergo long penances and were reconciled to the church much sooner than in Cappadocia. As the *Didascalia* mentions divisive persons being temporarily cast out on the first offense and permanently cast out on the second offense and the *Apostolic Canons* mention several types of offenders being suspended from the assembly, it appears that in Syria during the third and fourth centuries, people underwent penance for sins other than the three capital sins of adultery, murder, and apostasy.<sup>64</sup>

### 3 The Penitential System in Constantinople in the Second Half of the Fourth Century

Regarding Constantinople, both Socrates and Sozomen tell the story of how Nectarius, bishop of the city from 381–397 CE, had, in 391, abolished the office

63 The *Apostolic Tradition*, thought by some to be of Syrian provenance, contains no information on the administration of ecclesiastical penance.

64 Of course, one has to remember that these canons and the *Didascalia* are prescriptive rather than descriptive. There is no evidence of which I am aware as to whether these long penances in Cappadocia were ever carried out or if people in Syria were permanently excommunicated for being divisive.

of the priest who oversaw penance.<sup>65</sup> This was just six years prior to John's appointment to that see. Although these two historians describe the events leading up to this decision somewhat differently, it is clear that the abolishment of this office had to do with a scandal that had arisen when the congregation had discovered that one of the deacons had had sexual relations with a woman from the church.<sup>66</sup> According to Sozomen, the act took place inside the church building while the woman was performing her assigned penance.<sup>67</sup>

The office of this priest who oversaw penance was most likely equivalent to that of the priests who were appointed over the twenty-five districts in Rome.<sup>68</sup> Unlike in Rome, however, it appears that the practice of penance was fairly private, even before Nectarius had abolished this priestly office. Neither Socrates nor Sozomen mention an order of penitents or any formal ceremony for receiving, praying for, or reconciling penitents during the liturgy. Sozomen provides a succinct summary of the practice: "The sinners presented themselves to him [the priest appointed over penance] and confessed their transgressions, and he determined what it was necessary to do and the penalty to be paid for each sin, and when they had made satisfaction, he absolved them."<sup>69</sup> According to both Socrates and Sozomen, the penance that had been assigned to the woman before she had confessed that she had slept with the deacon was prayer and fasting.<sup>70</sup> Harsher penalties may have been imposed for more serious sins, however.

Sozomen relates that soon after Nectarius had made the decision to do away with this office, "the bishops nearly everywhere (σχεδὸν οἱ πανταχῇ ἐπίσκοποι)" followed his example. Both Socrates and Sozomen, however, mention that the practice was still retained by all Christian sects other than the Homoousians and Novatianists, and Sozomen adds that it was "carefully preserved in the churches throughout the West, especially in the church of the Romans."<sup>71</sup> He then goes on to describe the practice at Rome, which was discussed above.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, while Sozomen's statement that "bishops almost everywhere" followed Nectarius' example may only refer to Homoousian bishops in the East, it is possible that Flavian, the patriarch of Antioch at the time, abolished the

65 For a good summary of the different accounts of Socrates and Sozomen, see Watkins, *A History of Penance* I, 349–358.

66 See Socrates, *h.e.* 5.19 (GCS n.s. 1, 293–294); Sozomen, *h.e.* 7.16 (GCS n.s. 4, 322–324).

67 Sozomen, *h.e.* 7.16.8 (GCS n.s. 4, 323).

68 See Sozomen, *h.e.* 7.16.4 (GCS n.s. 4, 323); and Watkins, *A History of Penance* I, 478.

69 Sozomen, *h.e.* 7.16.3 (GCS n.s. 4, 323).

70 Socrates, *h.e.* 5.19 (GCS n.s. 1, 293); Sozomen *h.e.* 7.16.8 (GCS n.s. 4, 323).

71 Socrates, *h.e.* 5.19 (GCS n.s. 1, 293); Sozomen, *h.e.* 7.16.4 (GCS n.s. 4, 323).

72 Sozomen, *h.e.* 7.16.1 (GCS n.s. 4, 322).



office in his see some time in 391 or shortly thereafter. In addition to the scandal described above, Sozomen explains that the system had already begun to fall into disuse due to its “antiquity (ἀρχαιότητος),” “solemnity (σεμνότητος),” and “severity (ἀκριβείας).”<sup>73</sup> If Sozomen’s account is accurate in this regard, it would appear that a more rigorous and public form of penance continued in the West at least sixty years after it had purportedly been abandoned in Constantinople and the surrounding regions.<sup>74</sup> After the abolishment of this office in the latter regions, people were simply to refrain from or to partake of communion as their individual consciences forbade or permitted.<sup>75</sup>

From Sozomen’s account, it seems that ecclesiastical penance in Constantinople was mostly a private ordeal, even before Nectarius abolished the office of priest penitentiary. Confession was private, and there is no record of any grades or orders of penitents. After the position of priest penitentiary was eliminated, it does not seem that confession to a priest was required even for serious sins, although the people still may have had recourse to priests for private confession and counsel. At this point, penance probably became even more privatized than it had been prior to 391, with the only stipulation being that a person deprived himself of communion if he was aware of having committed a serious sin.

#### 4 Ecclesiastical Penance in John’s Congregations

John does not mention the penances of fasting ranging from two–seven weeks referred to in the *Didascalia* and *Apostolic Constitutions* or the priest penitentiary described by Socrates and Sozomen. What is discernible from several of his homilies thought to be of Antiochene provenance is that unrepentant offenders were excommunicated and required to perform penance for a time; known sinners were refused the Eucharist; and those guilty of certain sins were,

73 Sozomen, *h.e.* 7.16.10 (GCS n.s. 4, 324).

74 Sozomen began writing his *Ecclesiastical History* about 443 CE. Scholars are divided on whether or not some form of ecclesiastical penance continued in Constantinople after this event. See Robert Barringer, “Ecclesiastical Penance in the Church of Constantinople,” 20 with notes 2 and 3 on 220, and 35. Barringer, 35, concludes, based on Palladius’ *v. Chrys.* 2, 11, and 18, that the practice of penance continued for ten–twenty years after Nectarius had abolished the office of priest penitentiary. See also, Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*, 98–99, who maintains that the abolishment of the office of priest penitentiary can only be accepted for the area immediately under Constantinople’s jurisdiction.

75 Socrates, *h.e.* 5.19 (GCS n.s. 1, 293); Sozomen, *h.e.* 7.16.9 (GCS n.s. 4, 323–324).

on their own initiative, either to leave the assembly or to refrain from partaking of the Eucharist, according to the severity of their sins.

In *David* 3.1, John indicates that some sinners were expelled from the assembly, but it seems that they were readmitted as soon as they demonstrated contrition. He explains that the people who have been cast out because of their sins are better off than those who have attended the theatre the day before and then shamelessly approach to receive the Eucharist. "The former people who have been expelled in keeping with God's laws and remain outside, have good hopes in the meantime. For if they wish their sins for which they have been excluded from the church to be corrected, they will be able with a purified conscience to return."<sup>76</sup> John then equates attending the theatre with the sin of adultery, explaining that the male attendees have committed adultery in their hearts by lusting after the women on display there, and states that those who have committed this sin should willingly exclude themselves from the assembly.<sup>77</sup>

In *hom. in Mt.* 17.7, John states that fornicators, adulterers, and murderers are forbidden from entering the assembly and that he will also forbid perjurers from entering.<sup>78</sup> Finally, in *hom. in Mt.* 82.5–6, he admonishes those who are avaricious and merciless not to partake of the mysteries and instructs priests to withhold communion from those whom they know are approaching the table unworthily if the people do not refrain of their own accord.<sup>79</sup> In *hom. in Mt.* 71.4, John mentions prayers being offered for those in penance (ὕπὲρ ἐτέρων τῶν ἐν μετανοίᾳ), and in *hom. in 2 Cor.* 18.3, he speaks of the congregation saying an additional prayer "whenever we shut out from the holy precincts those who are unable to partake of the holy table."<sup>80</sup> Although it is not clear how long these people were required to do penance before they were readmitted to communion, for reasons to be discussed below, it is likely that John preferred the period to be as brief as possible. As John does not mention formal penitential procedures in any homilies of certain or even probable Constantinopolitan provenance, there is no evidence either to support or to refute Socrates' and Sozomen's accounts of the penitential discipline in the empire's capital.

<sup>76</sup> *David* 3.1 (CCSG 70, 49–50).

<sup>77</sup> CCSG 70, 50.

<sup>78</sup> PG 57, 264.

<sup>79</sup> PG 58, 744–745.

<sup>80</sup> *hom. in Mt.* 71.4 (PG 58, 666); *hom. in 2 Cor.* 18.3 (PG 61, 527). See also *hom. in Eph.* 3.4 (PG 62, 29), of uncertain provenance but traditionally assigned to Antioch, where John mentions that the penitents were to exit the church prior to the prayers (presumably, the prayers of the faithful, which followed the prayers of those in penance). The homiletical series on Ephesians is dated variously from 389–397. See Wendy Mayer, *Provenance*, 268, CPG no. 4431.

While none of these homilies are of certain Antiochene provenance, they are all parts of series traditionally assigned to Antioch. It appears, therefore, that one can make the following tentative assumptions regarding penance in John's Antiochene congregations. Serious sinners were excluded from the assembly until they had demonstrated that they were truly repentant. Then, they were prohibited from partaking of the Eucharist and from even being present for that part of the liturgy for some unspecified amount of time. People who had committed lesser sins, such as attending the theatre, being covetous, or not caring for the poor, were expected to refrain from partaking of the Eucharist and may have been deprived of the Eucharist by the priests if they did not abstain voluntarily. Although John does not give an exact list of the sins for which one was to be excluded from the assembly or from participation in the Eucharist, it seems that he does not limit the sins to murder, adultery, and apostasy. Finally, it seems that the penitential practice in Antioch during John's tenure as priest closely mirrored that described in the *Didascalia* and *Apostolic Constitutions*. Two important differences were that, in John's congregations, the priest, rather than the bishop, assigned the penances, and the penances included various penitential practices other than just fasting. This is shown to be the case based on several remarks of John regarding the role of priests in the administration of penance, to be discussed in greater detail below.

## 5 Penitential Practices to Which John Is Opposed

Although there is no evidence to suggest that John violated any of the prescribed penitential procedures followed in Syria during his day, he seems to be opposed to penitential practices in other parts of the empire such as very public and humiliating forms of penance and the limitation of just one penance for serious sins. He may not have been entirely opposed to long sentences in the case of some penitents, but he clearly does not think such protracted sentences are necessary to atone for serious sins. In cases that were left up to the discretion of the priest or bishop, he probably tended toward lighter sentences. This would be owing not only to his mercy toward sinners, but also to his views on what effectively did and did not combat sin. According to Augustine, those who had committed one of the capital sins, had to be "healed through a humbler penance."<sup>81</sup> For Jerome, the public humiliation and weeping to which Fabiola

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81 Augustine, *Fid. et op.* 19.34 (CSEL 41, 79–80).

had voluntarily subjected herself was part of the remedy for her sin.<sup>82</sup> John, on the other hand, preferred more private and less laborious remedies, even for the weightier sins.

### 5.1 *Public Penance*

It is evident from one of John's homilies against the Anomoeans, thought to have been delivered in 386 CE during his priesthood in Antioch, that he was opposed to the public confession of sins. Although private confession is consistent with the practice in Rome and North Africa, and in the case of adulteresses, in Cappadocia, penance, itself, was very public in these places as it also was in Milan. In *incomprehens.* 5, John seems to be alluding to the practices of public confession and public penance in a derogatory manner:

On this account, I exhort and beg and entreat you to confess to God continually. I do not lead you into a theatre of your fellow-servants, or compel you to disclose your sins to man. Unfold your conscience before God, and show him the wounds, and ask of him the remedies .... Speak then so that you may profit. Speak so that putting off here all your sins, you may go away cleansed from your transgressions, and may be delivered from that intolerable publicity.<sup>83</sup>

John is exhorting the members of his congregation to confess their sins to God alone and seems to be arguing that his conditions for repentance are not nearly as stringent and humiliating as those expected of sinners by other pastors or in other locations. In *Laz.* 4.4, one in a series of sermons John preached in 387, he even goes so far as to put these words into the Lord's mouth. "I do not compel you," he says, "to come into the midst of the theatre and to surround yourself with many witnesses. To me alone tell your sins in private so that I may heal your wound and relieve your pain."<sup>84</sup> It is not clear which sins John has in mind, but in any case, it is clear that John views private confession to God and private

82 Jerome, *ep.* 77.4–5 (Labourt, ed. *Lettres*, vol. 4, 42–45). See also Tertullian, *Paen.* 9 (SC 316, 180–182), who remarks that while exomologesis "casts a man down, it raises him more, while it makes him filthy, it purifies him more." Cited in Kevin Uhalde, "Juridical Administration in the Church and Pastoral Care in Late Antiquity," in *A New History of Penance*, ed. Abigail Firey (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 97–120 (102).

83 SC 28, 316 and 318.

84 PG 48, 1012. See also *poenit.* 6.5 (PG 49, 322), in which John encourages his members to make a private examination of their consciences and repent of any known sin prior to receiving the Eucharist rather than bringing the evidence "into a common theatre (εἰς κοινὸν θεάτρον)" before many witnesses.

penance as sufficient for forgiveness of, at least, some sins. This does not mean, however, that he thinks the role of the priest is unnecessary in dealing with serious sins, as I will discuss later.

### 5.2 *Long Sentences*

Regarding the duration of penance necessary, John indicates in several passages that this varies according to the degree of penitence shown by the sinner.<sup>85</sup> In *De beato Philogonio*, a sermon delivered on 20 December 386 on the feast-day of the Antiochene bishop Philogonius, and in *Ad Theodorum lapsum* 1, a treatise probably written in 387 CE in Antioch, John maintains that penance for serious sins can be accomplished in a single day.

In *De beato Philogonio*, John is trying to persuade his audience to do penance for their sins in the five days that remain before the Feast of Christ's Nativity so that they might partake of the Eucharist in a worthy manner.<sup>86</sup> Evidently, people would refrain from receiving communion, except on important feast days, and even then, would approach the table unworthily.<sup>87</sup> John is not referring only to people who have committed one of the capital sins, but to those who are concerned with worldly affairs and are not paying adequate attention to their spiritual well-being. He brings in the examples of the Ninevites in Jonah 3 and the prostitute in Luke 7 who anointed Jesus' feet with her tears as proof that God's anger can be placated and sins wiped away in a short time. After urging his audience to perform the opposite virtues to counter their vices, he states: "These things do not require days or many years, but only resolution, and may be accomplished in one day (ἐν μιᾷ ἡμέρᾳ) .... I testify and pledge that, if each of us who has sinned gives up his former evil deeds and promises to God truthfully not to touch them any longer, God will seek no other defense from us."<sup>88</sup> John then exhorts his hearers to abstain from the law courts, the council chambers, and all daily business for the next five days leading up to the feast so

85 See Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity*, 83–86, who argues that John inherited this idea from monastic views of repentance. Even Basil and Gregory of Nyssa allowed for the bishop to shorten the sentence if the sinner demonstrated especial fervor. See Basil, *ep.* 217, canons 74 and 84 (Y. Courtonne, ed. *Lettres* 11, 210–211, 213, 216–217); and Gregory, *ep. can.* (E. Mühlenberg, ed. *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 3/5, 6–9).

86 The Feast of Christ's Nativity had just been introduced into the liturgical calendar at Antioch a few years before John had been ordained as priest. See *nativ.* (PG 49, 351).

87 See also *hom. in Eph.* 3.4 (PG 62, 29), where John complains of the same problem. He chides his members for partaking of the Eucharist during Lent and on the feasts of Easter and Epiphany without first repenting of their sins, but of abstaining from the Eucharist at other times, even if they have no serious sins of which they need to repent.

88 *Philogon./anom.* 6 (PG 48, 754).

that they can prepare their souls for Christ's coming. Specifically, this preparation should consist of repentance, prayer, almsgiving, and devotion to spiritual matters.<sup>89</sup>

In *Ad Theodorum lapsum* 1, John again invokes the example of the Ninevites along with the stories of King Ahab in 1 Kings 21, King Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33, who sacrificed his own children and led Judah astray in making and worshipping idols, and the thief on the cross in Luke 23. He also quotes the first part of Ps. 95:9 to support his argument: "Today, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts as in the rebellion," and explains the meaning and application of "today."

Now, "today," may be uttered in every time of life, and if you wish, even old age: for repentance is not judged by quantity of time, but by disposition of soul. For the Ninevites did not need many days to wipe out that sin, but the short span of one day was sufficient to obliterate their whole transgression. And the robber did not take a long time to make his entrance into Paradise, but in however much time one spends in uttering a word, in such a decisive moment, he freed himself from the sins which he had committed throughout his entire life.<sup>90</sup>

In the above examples, which John enumerates from Scripture, all the sins committed are of a serious nature, including idolatry, prostitution, and child sacrifice, and in most cases, have piled up over many years. Yet, John asserts that if one is truly contrite, God judges the penance to be sufficient, even if it covers but a narrow span of time. This demonstrates that he does not think long penances are necessary in atoning for serious sins. A firm resolution not to sin again and a properly disposed soul seem to be sufficient to gain freedom from one's sins.

### 5.3 *Limitation of Just One Penance*

When John was deposed at the Synod of the Oak in the autumn of 403, one of the charges brought against him by Isaac the monk was that he "grants amnesty to sinners (ἀδειαν παρέχει τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσι)" by his claim that as often as they sin, he will heal them if only they repent and come to him.<sup>91</sup> Accord-

89 *Philogon./anom.* 6 (PG 48, 754–755).

90 *Thdr.* 1.6 (SC 117, 108 and 110).

91 SC 342, 110. Only Photius supplies a complete list of all the charges brought against John. These are presented by Anne-Marie Malingrey, ed. *Palladios: Dialogue sur la vie de Jean Chrysostome*. Tome II. SC 342, 100–114.

ing to the historian, Socrates, even John's friends censured him for urging sinners, "Enter, even if you have repented a thousand times (Χιλιάκις μετανόησας εἴσελθε)."92

Although there is no record anywhere in the East during the fourth century of limiting those who had committed serious sins to just one penance, it still appears that some of John's contemporaries thought him too lenient in this regard. While John does not explicitly say that a person may perform penance twice for the capital sins of idolatry and murder, neither does he say that he may not, and regarding adultery, he uses it as an example of a sin that has become habitual and of which one may repent multiple times before finally conquering it.

In *poenit* 8.1, he is seeking to prevent his hearers from giving into despair over their repeated sins.<sup>93</sup> "Do not give up. I never stop applying these medicines because I know how our not being hopeless is such a great weapon against the devil. If you have sins, do not despair. I never stop saying these things; and if you sin every day, repent every day."<sup>94</sup> John goes on to explain that if it were only up to a person's repentance, it would be hopeless. Due to the measureless philanthropy of God, however, one should persevere. John then brings in as examples the sins of attending the theatre and visiting a prostitute. Concerning the latter, he says:

When a physician applies a medicine to you and it does not cleanse you [of the disease], does he not apply it to you again on another day? There is a woodcutter. Let's say that he wants to cut down a tree; he takes the ax and cuts the root. If he gives one blow and the fruitless tree does not fall, does he not give it another blow? And a fourth, a fifth, and a tenth blow? You do the same thing. The prostitute is a tree, a fruitless tree that produces acorns as food for irrational pigs. Over a long period, it has become rooted in your thoughts; it has struck down your conscience in the covering of the trees. My word is the ax. You heard in one day, but how can something that has been rooted for so long fall in one day? It

92 Socrates, 6.21 (GCS n. s. 1, 345). The exact quotation cannot be found in any of John's surviving works. See, however, *hom. in Rom.* 20.2 (PG 60, 598); and *poenit.* 8.1 (PG 49, 337), where John states that one can repent every day without limiting this repentance to specific kinds of sins.

93 The exhortation not to despair over one's sins was a common monastic *topos* in the *Vitae* of the fourth and fifth centuries. Thus, it is likely that John derived this idea from his monastic period. See Barringer, "Ecclesiastical Penance in the Church of Constantinople," 56.

94 PG 49, 337.

does not matter whether it has been twice, three times, a hundred times, or ten-thousand times. Just cut the wicked and powerful thing, the wicked habit.<sup>95</sup>

In this passage, the physician is the priest, John himself, and the medicine or ax is his word. John realizes that certain sins may become addictive and deeply rooted and require several attempts to conquer. For this reason, he urges perseverance and frequent and repeated repentance. Although one cannot take this passage as proof that John allowed a person to be admitted to ecclesiastical penance more than once for the sins of adultery and fornication, it is proof that he taught that one could be forgiven of these sins even if he or she committed them multiple times. John may be speaking only to those whose sins are not known by others and who have never undergone formal penance, but he could also be speaking to those who have already undergone penance for these sins or those who have fallen again before completing their penance.<sup>96</sup>

## 6 John's Views on the Roles of the Church and Priests in Assisting Penitents and the Constitution of Penance

If John did not think long and humiliating penances and limiting penance to once in a lifetime were the way to deal with serious sins, how did he deal with them? Through excommunication and exclusion from the Eucharist as the *Didascalia* and *Apostolic Constitutions* prescribe? Although expulsion from the assembly and deprivation of the Eucharist might be effective in motivating a person to submit to formal church discipline, John did not view these penalties as remedies for sin. On the contrary, attendance at liturgy and reception of the Eucharist brought healing to those struggling with sin. Various other forms of repentance, but, especially, almsgiving also atoned for and aided one in overcoming sin.

### 6.1 *Role of the Church*

In *De Paenitentia* 2–3, in the context of discussing the various roads of repentance, John indicates that coming into the church is a part of the process. He

95 *poenit.* 8.1 (PG 49, 338).

96 For another example of John's ideas on the frequency with which one may repent, see *hom. in Rom.* 20.2 (PG 60, 598/hom. 21 in Field, 352), where he discusses the idea of daily repentance and daily renewal to combat daily sin.



exhorts his audience in *poenit.* 2.1: "Have you sinned? Come to church and say to God, 'I have sinned.'"<sup>97</sup> Again, in *poenit.* 3.4, he urges his congregants: "Have you sinned? Enter into the church and wipe away your sin .... For, here is a place of healing, not a place of judgment, not demanding an account of sins, but granting remission of sins."<sup>98</sup> Finally, in *Quod frequenter conveniendum sit* (*Novae homiliae* 3), a homily in a series dated to John's Constantinopolitan period, John demonstrates his welcoming attitude toward sinners, as well as his awareness that he, too, has need of the remedies of repentance.<sup>99</sup> "If you fornicate, or commit adultery, or plunder, or are greedy, come to the church so that you may learn to do such things no longer ... come and be healed with me, for even I, the one who heals, have need of medicines."<sup>100</sup>

One of the reasons John emphasizes coming to church can be found in *hom. in Mt.* 4.8. He is comparing the sin of rage (θυμός) to a serpent and the other passions to worms. John then rhetorically asks what kind of potion one can

97 PG 49, 285. Dallen, *The Reconciling Community*, 75, has also noted that John is here speaking of private confession to God, rather than public confession during the liturgy, which was part of the rite of ecclesiastical penance in some locations. Although Dallen understands this private confession to God as a "concession" that John made to his members who were unwilling to undergo ecclesiastical penance (75, 387), the homilies in *De Paenitentia* neither support nor refute this conclusion. We do not know whether John was speaking of minor sins, the capital sins, or both. Therefore, there is no indication that John was proposing these private acts of penance as alternatives to ecclesiastical penance. The text simply indicates that John encouraged his members to heal their sins through acts of repentance. Dallen reasons that the requirements of ecclesiastical penance were so severe and antiquated that few people were willing to submit to them and that John encouraged his congregants to seek the advice of a spiritual director and perform private penance as an alternative (75). As I have argued, it is doubtful that the requirements of ecclesiastical penance in fourth-century Antioch were that severe. It is possible, however, that a person might refuse to undergo formal ecclesiastical penance out of fear of being exposed as having committed grave sin. In any case, as the evidence from John's Antiochene homilies have shown, private rather than public confession of sins was the normal procedure in ecclesiastical and private penance.

98 PG 49, 297–298.

99 Wendy Mayer, "Les homélies de s. Jean Chrysostome en juillet 399: A second look at Pargoire's sequence and the chronology of the *Novae homiliae* (CPG 4441)," *Byzantinoslavica* 60.2 (1999): 273–303 (292–294), tentatively dates the homily to 400 on the basis that the person whom it mentions has fallen from power is a certain Theodore, referred to by name in *hom. in Ac.* 41. She also thinks a date of mid-September 399, suggested by Bonsdorff, *Zur Predigtätigkeit*, 75, is possible. In this case, Eutropius would be the person who had suffered a reversal of fortune. In the end, however, she maintains that neither of these dates may be correct as the individual to which the homily refers could be some other unknown person.

100 PG 63, 462.

drink, which will kill all of these worms and serpents. The answer: “the precious blood of Christ if received with great confidence,” “and with this, the strict hearing of the divine Scriptures,” and “almsgiving added to one’s hearing (ἐλεημοσύνη τῇ ἀκροάσει προσγινομένη).”<sup>101</sup> Where else could one go to hear the Scriptures expounded and receive the Eucharist? Hearing the Scriptures would be helpful both in convincing people that they needed to repent and in strengthening their resolve to resist temptation. Provided they had repented of sin, their reception of the Eucharist was “able to extinguish every disease (πάσαν νόσον σβέσαι δυνήσεται).”<sup>102</sup> Almsgiving, which similarly, was able to heal every wound, could be done anywhere, but the church was certainly one convenient place where one might perform this good deed.

As John saw the church as a sort of hospital for sinners, he would not have wanted those who were sincerely sorry for their past misdeeds to be absent any longer than necessary. Likewise, because he viewed the Eucharist as a remedy for sin, he would not have desired to deprive sincere penitents of its medicinal power for long periods. He only wanted to guard against people taking it in an unrepentant state.<sup>103</sup>

## 6.2 *Role of Priests*

Just as John saw attendance at the liturgy as playing a vital role in the reconciling process, so he viewed the priest as playing a pivotal role as Christ’s representative and a physician of souls. In *De Sacerdotio*, a treatise on the dignity and duties of the priesthood, written between 388–391,<sup>104</sup> John clearly states his belief in the God-given authority of priests to remit and retain sins, at least, at the time of baptism and impending death.<sup>105</sup> Drawing on both Matt. 18:18 and John 20:23, he states:

<sup>101</sup> PG 57, 50.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> See *Philogon./anom.* 6 (PG 48, 754–755).

<sup>104</sup> Martin Illert, *Johannes Johnus und das antiochenisch-syrische Mönchtum: Studien zu Theologie, Rhetorik, und Kirchenpolitik im antiochenischen Schriftum des Johannes Johnus* (Zürich: Pano Verlag, 2000), 18–21, dates the treatise to 388, and J.N.D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John; Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (London: Duckworth, 1995), 83, dates the work to 390–391.

<sup>105</sup> Several lines after this, John states, “For not only whenever they regenerate us, but after these things, they have authority to remit sins (Οὐ γὰρ ὅταν ἡμᾶς ἀναγεννώσι μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ μετὰ ταῦτα συγχωρεῖν ἔχουσιν ἑξουσίαν ἁμαρτημάτων).” He then quotes James 5:14, 15, which urges calling upon the elders to pray and to anoint a sick person with oil, which not only effects the patient’s physical healing, but the forgiveness of sins. Paul W. Harkins, trans., *St. John Chrysostom On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, Fathers of the Church 72 (Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 161, note 97, interprets this as John saying that the priest can only absolve sins at baptism and at the “last anoint-

For they who inhabit the earth and occupy themselves in this way are entrusted with administering the things in heaven and have received an authority that God has not given to the angels or archangels. For it has not been said to them, “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” ....this binding touches the soul itself and transcends the heavens; and what priests work below God ratifies above, and the Master confirms the judgment of his servants. For indeed, what else has he given to them but all manner of heavenly authority? “For,” he says “whose sins you forgive, are forgiven, and whose sins you retain, are retained.” What authority could be greater than this?<sup>106</sup>

Although John does not normally stress priests’ authority to forgive sins in his homilies, it is evident from this passage that he saw the authority that Christ entrusted to his apostles to loose and to bind sin as being given to priests and bishops as well. Earlier in *De Sacerdotio*, he talks of the tact necessary of priests in convincing sinners to do penance and to submit to “the remedies of the priests (τῶν ἱερέων θεραπειαίς)” voluntarily.<sup>107</sup> John, therefore, does not diminish the role of the priest in dealing with sins, but thinks the matter should be dealt with privately and without making a spectacle.

### 6.3 Constitution of Penance

What were some of these “remedies of the priests” to which John refers? John taught that there were many modes of repentance capable of wiping out sins committed after baptism. In *De diabolo tentatore* 1, probably delivered in early 388 in Antioch, he enumerates five “roads” of repentance: the condemnation of one’s sins, forgiving one’s neighbors, prayer, almsgiving, and humility.<sup>108</sup> Again,

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ing.” Although the text can be interpreted this way, it can also be interpreted as saying the priest can absolve sins after baptism, one example of which is absolving sins when a person is ill.

106 *de sac.* 3.5 (SC 272, 148).

107 *de sac.* 2.3 (SC 272, 112).

108 *diab.* 1.5 (SC 560, 150)/*diab.* 2.6 in PG 49, 263. Adina Peleanu, ed., *Jean Chrysostome, L'Impuissance du diable* (Paris: Cerf, 2013), 13, who has recently demonstrated that the first homily in this series is actually the third homily in *De prophetiarum obscuritate*, agrees with earlier scholarship that it was preached in Antioch, but maintains contra Tillemont and Stilling that the homilies were delivered during the week after Easter rather than in Lent and that we cannot know the precise year. Stilling had assigned the series to Lent of 386, and Tillemont to Lent of 388. See J. Stilling, “De S. Joanne Chrysostomo, episcopo Constantinopolitano et ecclesiae doctore, prope comana in Ponto, commentaries historicus,” 401–700 in *Acta Sanctorum Septembris*, IV (Antwerp: Apud Bernardum Albertum vander Plassche, 1753), 464; and L.S. Lenain de Tillemont, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclé-*

in *De Paenitentia* 2–3, two of a series of homilies thought to have been preached in Antioch in 386/387, John lists six “roads” of repentance: “confession to God in the church, mourning (πενθῶν) for one’s sins, humility, almsgiving, prayer, and weeping (κλαίων) for one’s sins.”<sup>109</sup> Although almsgiving is listed fourth in the series, John raises it above the other practices as he refers to it as the “queen of the virtues”<sup>110</sup> in 3.1 and states in 3.4: “Hence, you have almsgiving as a foremost and great repentance (πρώτην καὶ μεγάλην μετάνοιαν), one that can ransom you from the bondage of your sins.”<sup>111</sup>

Similarly, in *hom. in Heb.* 9, the series of which is traditionally assigned to Constantinople, John lists several remedies of repentance capable of healing post-baptismal sin.<sup>112</sup> The only difference is that this list is slightly longer. After explaining that repentance for sins after baptism is possible, John asks his auditors: “What then is the medicine of repentance and how is it made up?” He then goes on to list each of the ingredients:

condemnation of our own sins .... much humility .... assiduous prayers, many tears by day and by night .... much almsgiving .... not being angry, not remembering past injuries, forgiving all their sins .... converting brothers from their error .... being submissive to the priests .... standing up for those who have been wronged, not holding on to anger, bearing all things meekly.<sup>113</sup>

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*siastique des six premiers siècles* XI (Paris: chez Charles Robustel, 1706), 46–61. See also, Adina Peleanu, “Deux séries chrysostomiennes: *Sur l’impuissance du diable* et *Sur l’obscurité des prophéties*,” *Revue d’études augustiniennes et patristiques* 57 (2011): 89–108, for her argument of why homily 1 of *De diabolo tentatore* should be homily 3 of *De prophetiarum obscuritate*.

109 PG 49, 277–298. For the dating of the series, *De Paenitentia*, see Gus George Christo, “Introduction” in *St. John Chrysostom: On Repentance and Almsgiving*, trans. Gus George Christo. Fathers of the Church 96 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), xv.

110 PG 49, 293.

111 PG 49, 297.

112 For the dating of this homiletical series, see Max von Bonsdorff, *Zur Predigtstätigkeit des Johannes Johnus, biographisch-chronologische Studien über seine Homilien zu neutestamentlichen Büchern*, diss. (Helsinki, 1922), 109–116; and Tillemont, *Mémoires* XI 378–379 and 378 n. 1. Bonsdorff, 109–110, finds evidence in Homily 9, specifically, that it is of Constantinopolitan provenance. See, however, Pauline Allen and Wendy Mayer, “The thirty-four homilies on Hebrews: the last series delivered by John in Constantinople?,” *Byzantion* 65 (1995): 309–348, (318–320), who argue that Bonsdorff’s criterion for assigning Constantinopolitan provenance to this and other homilies in the series is faulty and that there is not enough evidence in *hom.* 9 to assign it to either Antioch or Constantinople. See also Mayer, *Provenance*, 268, CPG no. 4440, for a summary of the dates assigned to this work by various authors.

113 *hom. in Heb.* 9.4 (PG 63, 80–81). Other modes of repentance for John include: teaching

Here, almsgiving is listed among a range of penitential acts, yet, John pauses to give it special emphasis.

There is need of much almsgiving (ἐλεημοσύνης): for this it is which especially gives strength to the medicine of repentance (φάρμακον τῆς μετανοίας). And as there is a medicine among the physicians' remedies which takes many herbs, but one is more important, so also in the case of repentance, this is the principal herb (βοτάνη κυριωτέρα), indeed, it may be everything (καὶ τὸ πᾶν αὕτη γένοιτο ἄν). (ibid.)<sup>114</sup>

John typically exalts almsgiving over other forms of repentance because it has power to reverse the effects of sin on the soul, such as losing the will to resist sin, viewing the world and humans through a distorted lens, and developing vices, and because it benefits others than the one performing the action.<sup>115</sup> It is probably this first reason, however, by which John justifies his claim that almsgiving can cleanse and heal every sin.

It appears that one may follow these roads or apply these remedies of repentance with or without the counsel of a priest. In light of two passages of undisputed Antiochene provenance, *de sac.* 2.3, which mentions "the remedies of the priests (τῶν ἱερέων θεραπαίαις)," and *stat.* 3, which urges the showing of the wound to the priest (τῷ ἱερεὶ δεῖξον τὸ ἔλκος), it is possible that in Antioch, one confessed sins in private to a priest after which the priest assigned some suitable penance (that may or may not have included formal ecclesiastical penance), but for lesser, more common sins, the people could perform these various acts of their own accord without first confessing to a priest.<sup>116</sup> Likewise,

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(*hom. in Mt.* 77.5 [PG 58, 709]), defending and caring for orphans and widows (*exp. in Ps.* 128.1 [PG 55, 367–368]), and love (*hom. in Mt.* 46.4 [PG 58, 480–481]; *hom. in Mt.* 77.5 [PG 58, 709]).

<sup>114</sup> PG 63, 81.

<sup>115</sup> For almsgiving's transformative effects on the soul, see *hom. in Jo.* 81.3 (PG 59, 442), *hom. in Jo.* 73.2–3 (PG 59, 398), and the section "Personal Transformation: Ethical Deification" in chapter three. For almsgiving's superiority over other ascetic practices due to its benefits for others, see *hom. in Tit.* 6.10 (PG 62, 698): "Virginity, fasting, and lying on the ground only establish the one who practices them, and no other is saved. But almsgiving extends to all and embraces the members of Christ, and actions that extend to many are far greater than those which are confined to one."

<sup>116</sup> SC 272, 112; PG 49, 54. Both the treatise, *De Sacerdotio* and the homily, *stat.* 3, are confidently assigned to John's Antiochene period. For the dating of *De Sacerdotio*, see note 61 above and for the dating of *stat.* 3, see Franz van de Paverd, *St. John Chrysostom, The Homilies on the Statues: An Introduction*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 239 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto

in Constantinople, as the phrase, “being submissive to the priests” from *hom. in Heb.* 9.4 suggests, people still had access to the priests for private confession and counsel even if the penitential system had been abolished. A priest might counsel a penitent to pray, fast, or give alms to heal a particular sin or the penitent might choose to perform these acts of her own accord.

What, then, is the relationship between these remedies or roads of repentance and formal, ecclesiastical penance? It is likely that in Antioch, for people who had committed serious sins which were known to the community, the priests still excommunicated and withheld the Eucharist from them for a time. If the people wished to be reconciled to the church and were willing to undergo penance, John and other priests prescribed things like prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to help atone for and heal the effects of their sins. Thus, these remedies for sin were applied in tandem with the formal penitential discipline. In Constantinople, although the public penitential discipline had most likely disappeared by 391, it is likely that the mediation of the priests was still required in reconciling people who had committed grave sins known to the church and community.<sup>117</sup> Still, however, the priests would recommend the same remedies, such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and forgiving others, etc., and might continue to exclude these people from the assembly or from the Eucharist until they could be assured of their sincere repentance.

It is important to remember, however, that even when the formal, penitential system was in place, there might be several reasons why the priests would recommend private penance, instead. If the person's sins were not known, it might be unwise and even dangerous to expose the penitent. James Dallen has argued that several clerics in the West were unwilling or unable to enforce the canons regulating penance for unknown sinners for several reasons, including punishment by civil authorities, revenge, social ostracism, or the threat to disunity in the church community.<sup>118</sup> Given John's distaste for penitential spectacles, he may have reserved the formal penitential discipline for people whose sins were well-known and likely to have caused scandal. Another possibility is, as Dallen has suggested, that John granted concessions to those members of

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Oriente, 1991), 297, who dates the work precisely to 28 February 387, the Sunday before the start of Lent. See also, Mayer, *Provenance*, 246 and 530.

117 See footnote 73 above for Barringer's conclusion that some form of ecclesiastical penance continued in Constantinople for ten–twenty years after Nectarius abolished the office of priest penitentiary.

118 Dallen, *The Reconciling Community*, 76.

his flock who were unwilling to submit to the formal penitential procedure.<sup>119</sup> The point is that ecclesiastical penance, even in Antioch prior to 391, was not always an option. It was most certainly not an option in the West for those who had already undergone it and fallen again. Yet, Augustine still held out hope for these individuals. Presumably, therefore, in instances where ecclesiastical penance was not an option, priests and bishops would have relied on these other remedies instead—even in treating the capital sins.

The key difference between these other pastors and John was that they did not believe that almsgiving alone could atone for the three capital sins of murder, adultery, and apostasy. Recall Augustine's words from *Fid. et op.* 19.34: "There are others who are of the opinion that sin is easily compensated for by almsgiving. Nevertheless, these do not doubt that there are three "deadly (*mortifera*)" sins for which they should be punished and excommunicated until they are healed through a humbler penance: impurity, idolatry, and homicide."<sup>120</sup> By contrast, John confidently asserted that there is "no sin, which alms cannot cleanse, none, which alms cannot quench." Almsgiving is a "medicine adapted to every wound."<sup>121</sup>

## 7 Conclusion

Based on the evidence presented above, it appears that during John's time in Antioch, there was not a harsh penitential system in place, with temporary exclusion from the assembly followed by temporary exclusion from the Eucharist being the most severe penalty and temporary exclusion from the Eucharist serving as a penalty for lighter sins. By the time John was made bishop of Constantinople, it appears that the penitential system there had been abolished, with confession to a priest not being required and voluntary exclusion from the Eucharist being the only penalty for sin. As John, himself, had the reputation of being lenient with sinners, it follows that he would not have enforced a stricter penitential system than that required by the church. Still, however, it is obvious that John, as a priest and later a bishop, was not ambivalent toward sin, but felt it his duty as a physician of souls to provide remedies for sin. In

119 Ibid., 75. Dallen argues that John allowed people who had committed serious sin to partake of the Eucharist after only performing penance for a few days. He seems to argue this on the basis of John's words in *poenit.* 6.5 (PG 49, 322). I think this is possible, but it is not clear that John is speaking of one of the capital sins in this context.

120 CSEL 41, 79–80.

121 *hom. in Ac.* 25.3 (PG 60, 196).

other places in the empire, the very public and humiliating nature of penance, the prohibitions following penance, and the long duration of penance served as the remedies for serious sin, but John did not have these medicines at his disposal in the cities in which he pastored.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, even if they were available, it is doubtful if he would have considered them useful. He had, therefore, to depend on other remedies, which were used in other places for less serious sins, such as prayer, forgiving others, weeping, and almsgiving, to heal the more serious sins as well. Almsgiving, however, was his remedy of choice as it helped to reverse some of sin's negative effects and benefited others besides the sinner. These were the reasons John cited, and I believe, the main reasons, but perhaps there were other reasons as well. These unspoken reasons will be the subject of the final two chapters.

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<sup>122</sup> See Watkins, 330 and 345–346, who explains that the large number of Christians in Antioch, many of whom were recent converts and possibly, less devoted, made the implementation of a harsh penitential system impossible. See also Barringer, "Ecclesiastical Penance in the Church of Constantinople," 57–58, who similarly argues that the rapid growth in the number of Christians in Constantinople during the fourth and fifth centuries, coupled with the inevitable moral decline that followed from this growth, made it impossible to carry out in everyday life the prescribed penitential procedures "enshrined in the church canons" from the pre-Constantinian era.



## “The Same Philosophy Is Demanded of All”: Almsgiving as an Equal Opportunity for Growth in Virtue and a Means to Unity

Just as John promotes almsgiving as an alternative for harsher forms of penance operative in other parts of the empire, he also promotes almsgiving as a way to create unity and provide equal opportunity for growth in virtue among his congregants. From John's homilies, one can see that his audiences at Antioch and Constantinople were very diverse. They consisted of rich and poor, men and women, married and celibates, baptized and unbaptized, and orthodox and “heretics.” On different occasions, they included wealthy landowners,<sup>1</sup> artisans and laborers,<sup>2</sup> soldiers,<sup>3</sup> the poor,<sup>4</sup> married women,<sup>5</sup> consecrated virgins and widows,<sup>6</sup> children,<sup>7</sup> slaves,<sup>8</sup> farmers,<sup>9</sup> monks,<sup>10</sup> possibly Jews,<sup>11</sup> non-Nicene Christians,<sup>12</sup> and even, the demon-possessed.<sup>13</sup> As Jaclyn L. Maxwell,

1 *hom. in Ac.* 7 (PG 60, 68), 10 (PG 60, 92), 18 (PG 60, 147).

2 *kal.* 3 (PG 48, 957); *hom. in Mt.* 15.1 (PG 57, 223), 61.2 (PG 58, 590); *stat.* 5.2 (PG 49, 71).

3 *poenit.* 3 (PG 49, 291); *catech.* 8.17 (SC 50, 256–257).

4 See *Laz.* 7.5 (PG 48, 1052–1053); 2.1 (PG 48, 981); 6.3 (PG 48, 1031); *Pet. mat. fil. Zeb.* (SC 396, 178)/*c. anom.* 8.2 (PG 48, 771); and *elem.* 3 (PG 51, 265). See also, Jaclyn L. Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity*, 69, for the idea that the category of “the poor” shifted and could mean everyone except the wealthy landowners (i.e. those at risk for poverty) or the utterly destitute, depending on the context. While Maxwell, 70–72, does hold beggars were occasionally present in John's audience, Mayer, “John Chrysostom on Poverty,” 86–87, note 104, only points to one place in John's corpus, *catech.* 2.13 (SC 50 bis, 140), which may indicate this. Mayer argues that beggars were normally stationed at the doors of the sanctuary to solicit alms from those entering and exiting.

5 See *hom. in Col.* 7 (PG 62, 350); *Ne tim.* (PG 55, 501); *hom. in Heb.* 28.5 (PG 63, 198); and *Vid. elig.* 6 (PG 51, 336).

6 For the presences of virgins, see *poenit.* 3.3 (PG 49, 296); *Eutrop.* (PG 52, 394); *Post. reliq. mart.* (PG 63, 468); and *Vid. elig.* 6 (PG 51, 336); and for the presence of widows, see *hom. in Heb.* 28.6 (PG 63, 200); and *Vid. elig.* 6 (PG 51, 336).

7 *hom. in Ac.* 29 (PG 60, 218); See also, *Con. App.* 2.57.12 (SC 320, 316).

8 *hom. in 2 Thess.* 3 (PG 62, 484); *Laz.* 6.2 (PG 48, 1029).

9 *catech.* 8.2 (SC 50, 248–249); *stat.* 19.2 (PG 49, 188).

10 See *stat.* 17 (PG 49, 172–174); *hom. in Heb.* 15 (PG 63, 122); and *catech.* 8 (SC 50 bis, 247–251), where the monks are Syrian-speaking and also priests.

11 See *Jud.* 5.3 (PG 48, 886).

12 See *Pet. mat. fil. Zeb.* (SC 396, 168)/*c. anom.* 8.1 (PG 48, 769).

13 *incomprehens.* 4.41 (SC 28, 258–259).

concludes, "Although the exact proportion of different types of people among lay Christians cannot be known for certain, the content of the sermons clearly points toward a diverse audience."<sup>14</sup> While Jews, non-Nicene Christians, and monks appear to have been present only occasionally, these other groups were likely in regular attendance at the Sunday *synaxis*. These different groups did not always mix well. The rich could be tempted to look down upon the poor while the poor might be inclined to envy and despise the rich.<sup>15</sup> Consecrated virgins might think themselves superior to married women.<sup>16</sup> Married women might be jealous of the virgins because they enjoyed greater freedom from domestic responsibilities and male authority, or they might look down upon them due to their lack of worldly experience. Also, although it is likely that male ascetics or monks were not regularly present in John's congregations, it appears from John's Antiochene homilies that some people in his congregation especially revered these holy men (ἅγιοι). They did not seek to imitate them, however, because they thought the monks were called to a higher standard of holiness than themselves.<sup>17</sup> John combated this excuse by stressing to his audience that God expected the same level of holiness from married people as from monks and would judge both of these groups based on how well they cared for the poor. While the demands of family life prevented married people from performing acts of extreme self-mortification and observing virginity, they did not exempt them from caring for the poor and suffering. Similarly, John chided some ascetics and virgins who viewed themselves as exempt from almsgiving,

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- 14 Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity*, 67. While scholars agree that most of Chrysostom's comments were directed at male head-of-households, they disagree on what this tells us about the actual composition of his audience. Some, such as Ramsey MacMullen, "The Preacher's Audience (AD 350–400)," *Journal of Theological Studies* 40 (1989): 503–511, conclude that Chrysostom's regular audience consisted mostly of wealthy, elite, males. Others, such as Jaclyn L. Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity*, 69, argue that Chrysostom's audience consisted mostly of the middle class. Wendy Mayer, "Female Participation and the Late Fourth-Century Preacher's Audience," *Augustinianum* 39 (1999): 139–147 (146–147), has even suggested that in some churches, the majority of Chrysostom's audience consisted of female ascetics.
  - 15 For evidence in John's congregations of the rich showing contempt for the poor, see *hom. in 1 Cor.* 27.5 (PG 61, 230–231). For mention of the "poor" envying the rich, see *hom. in Ps.* 48:17 1.3 (PG 55, 502); *hom. in Phil.* 1 in Field, 6 = *hom. in Phil.* pref. in PG 62, 181; *hom. in Mt.* 90.3 (PG 58, 791); and *hom. in Jo.* 37.3 (PG 59, 210). It is clear that in these homilies, John is addressing the relative poor or those who are in danger of falling into poverty, not the destitute.
  - 16 See *hom. in 1 Cor.* 30.4 (PG 61, 254).
  - 17 See *oppugn.* 3.14 (PG 47, 374); *hom. in Gen.* 21.6 (PG 53, 183); *Jud.* 8.4 (PG 48, 932); *hom. in Mt.* 2.5 (PG 57, 30); 43.5 (PG 57, 464). See also Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity*, 129–133; and Peter Brown, *The Body & Society*, 309–312.

thinking it enough to devote themselves to “spiritual” labors or trusting that the merit of their virginity alone was enough to save them. According to John, virginity and harsher forms of asceticism were optional for those wishing to enter heaven, but almsgiving was not. He consistently maintained that almsgiving was essential for salvation.

Almsgiving was thus a responsibility in which the married and celibates and rich and poor all shared. John expected every Christian, including the poor, consecrated virgins, and monks, to give alms. The amount was inconsequential; only the right disposition was required.<sup>18</sup> Almsgiving did not even necessarily involve giving money, but could include other deeds of mercy, such as visiting or caring for the sick.<sup>19</sup> By this definition, no person, regardless of his or her financial status, was exempt from giving alms. Therefore, as all classes were capable of almsgiving, all classes were capable of attaining virtue.

John also employed almsgiving as a means of unifying the diverse groups within his congregations. He described it as creating a bond of friendship between the giver and receiver and as a reciprocal relationship in which both the donor and recipient were dependent upon one another. The recipients were dependent upon the donors for their sustenance, and the donors were dependent upon the recipients for their prayers and for a means to be cleansed of their sins. John hoped that this mutual dependence between giver and receiver would narrow the divide between the rich and poor, clergy and laypeople, and married and virgins/widows supported by the church.

## 1 Almsgiving as a Criterion of Judgment for Both Monks and Married People

In *Adversus Oppugnatores*, as John attempts to convince Christian parents that God expects the same degree of holiness from monks and married people, he cites disregard of the poor as a sin that both groups commit, and subsequently, will be judged for equally. Christian parents reason that the penalties for falling into sin are greater for monks, who have dedicated themselves to God, than for people living in the world. The parents’ fear, therefore, is that if their children

18 See *hom. in Mt.* 52.4 (PG 58, 523); and chapter one, 2. Although John was not interested in any specific amount of money, he did maintain that those who gave up all their possessions excelled above those who only gave out of their superfluity. See *hom. in 1 Cor.* 30.4 (PG 61, 254).

19 See *hom. in Mt.* 78.3 (PG 58, 714–715); *exp. in Ps.* 128:1 (PG 55, 367–368); and chapter one, 2–5.

do become monks and fail to meet the spiritual standards for such a calling, they will be judged more severely than if they had sinned while remaining in the world. John sharply repudiates this view as he does in several of his later homilies.<sup>20</sup> In this particular case, he meets the objection by pointing out that Paul urged all people not just to imitate monks, or even Jesus' disciples, but Jesus, himself.

When he [Paul] orders us to imitate not only the monks, not only the disciples, but Christ himself, when he decrees the greatest punishment for those who do not imitate them, how can you say that this [way of life] is a greater height? For, it is necessary that all rise to the same height! And this is what overthrows the whole world, that we suppose it is required only of the monk to observe a greater strictness, while the rest of us can discharge ourselves to live frivolously. But this is not true! It is not! Rather, he says, the same philosophy is demanded of all.<sup>21</sup>

John brings in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke 16:19–31 as an illustration of a non-monk being judged for disregard of the poor. In this parable, the rich man, whom John presumes was married, goes to a place of torment after his death because he ignored the suffering of Lazarus, a poor beggar who lay outside his door, hungry and covered with sores. John points out that the rich man was judged "simply because he was a cruel man," not because he did not live the life of a recluse. Next, he employs the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins from Matt. 25:1–13 to demonstrate that the celibate will be similarly judged for not caring for the poor. In this parable, as will be recalled from chapter two, the five foolish virgins run out of oil for their lamps while waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. John understands the oil to be almsgiving, the bridegroom to be Christ, and the arrival of the bridegroom to be Christ's second coming. While the foolish virgins go out to buy more oil, the bridegroom arrives, and the wedding banquet commences. When the five foolish virgins return and knock on the door where the celebration is taking place, the bridegroom refuses to let them in. John, here as elsewhere, uses this parable to explain that virginity by itself is insufficient for salvation and that almsgiving is necessary for salvation. The five foolish virgins, despite having consecrated themselves to God through their commitment to celibacy, were

20 See *Laz.* 3.1 (PG 48, 992); *hom. in Gen.* 21.6 (PG 53, 183); 43.1 (PG 54, 396); *hom. in Mt.* 2.5 (PG 57, 30); 7.8 (PG 57, 81); 43.5 (PG 57, 464); 55.6 (PG 58, 548); *Jud.* 8.4 (PG 48, 932); and *hom. in Heb.* 7 (PG 63, 67–68).

21 *oppugn.* 3.14 (PG 47, 373–374).

not allowed into the wedding banquet because they “lacked philanthropy.”<sup>22</sup> In this particular case, because the point of the treatise is to exalt monasticism, John muses that the virgins, precisely because they had committed themselves to virginity, were perhaps judged less severely. While they were told by Christ, “I do not know you,” the goats in the parable at the end of this chapter (Matt. 25:31–46) were told, “Depart to that fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” He says, however, that he will not argue with the one who says these statements of Jesus mean the same thing. In this passage, John teaches that almsgiving is a virtue expected and even required of both monks and married people and that God will hold both classes of people to the same standard of holiness.<sup>23</sup>

John explains that it does not matter that married people are prevented from performing certain acts of asceticism, such as observing virginity and fasting rigorously, because the virtues that truly count are the ones that benefit others, such as almsgiving and showing mercy. A passage from *hom. in Mt.* 46.3–4 illustrates this point well. John has been discussing how the twelve apostles after the death of Jesus were able to spread the Gospel and convert people throughout the world. Then, in his typical style, he brings in an objection from his audience. “‘But,’ one says, ‘they had miracles.’”<sup>24</sup> He goes on to explain that it is not miracles, but virtue that pleases God and has power to convert sinners. After bringing in several examples of virtuous men from Scripture, such as John the Baptist, Elijah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he concludes by asking, “Don’t you seen that our way of life (βίον) is able to profit more? Now, I say way of life, not meaning that you should fast or even that you should scatter sackcloth and ashes under yourselves, but if you despise money as it ought to be despised, if you love tenderly, if you give your bread to the poor, if you conquer anger, if you

22 John refers to this passage several times in his works. The oil is either philanthropy (φιλο-  
θρωπία), as here in *oppugn.* 3.14 (PG 47, 374); *Hab. eund. spir.* 1.6 (PG 51, 277); and *hom. in*  
*Heb.* 28.7 (PG 63, 202); almsgiving (ἐλεημοσύνη) as in *poenit* 3.2 (PG 49, 293–294); *hom. in*  
*Jo.* 23.4 (PG 59, 142–143); 77.5 (PG 59, 420); and *El. et vid.* 1 (PG 51, 337); philanthropy and  
almsgiving as in *hom. in Mt.* 78.1 (PG 58, 711–712); *Pet. mat. fil. Zeb.* (SC 396, 174)/*c. anom.* 8.2  
(PG 48, 770); and *Vid. elig.* 5 (PG 51, 336); or more generally, mercy to those in need, such as  
those mentioned in Mt. 25:31–46, as in *hom. in Rom.* 18.6 (PG 60, 581/hom. 19 in Field, 323).  
See also *hom. in 1 Thess.* 11 (PG 62, 461), where John also equates oil with almsgiving, but in  
reference to 1 Thess. 5:19–22, where Paul exhorts his audience not to quench the Spirit.

23 See also *Hab. eund. spir.* (PG 51, 278), where John addresses both the married and virgins in  
his audience: “Therefore, you know these things, beloved, both those busied with marriage  
and those who profess virginity. We have expounded much concerning eagerness in alms-  
giving because there is no other way to attain the kingdom of heaven (Ταῦτ’ οὖν ἅπαντα  
εἰδότες, ἀγαπητοί, καὶ οἱ γάμοις ὁμιλοῦντες, καὶ οἱ παρθενίαν ἀσκοῦντες, πολλὴν ἐπιδειξώμεθα  
περὶ τὴν ἐλεημοσύνην σπουδὴν, ἐπειδὴ μὴδὲ ἑτέρως ἔστι τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν ἐπιτυχεῖν.”)

24 *hom. in Mt.* 46.3 (PG 58, 479).

drive out vanity, if you do away with jealousy."<sup>25</sup> He thus admonishes his congregation that strict ascetic practices are not as important as being free from the love of money and showing concern for one's neighbor. He then adds that Jesus did not command his disciples to fast, but he did instruct his disciples not to take money in their purses when he sent them out on missions. Finally, he indicates where almsgiving stands with regard to virginity. "For the greatest thing is love and gentleness and almsgiving, which even overshoots virginity. If, therefore, you wish to become equal to the apostles, there is nothing to prevent you. For practicing this virtue only is sufficient for not falling short in any of the others."<sup>26</sup> The laity, John claims, are capable of the same degree of virtue as the monks because they are capable of exhibiting the qualities of love, moderation, and almsgiving. Fasting, virginity, and other rigorous acts of self-denial, including virginity, are lesser virtues according to John. This is, of course, not to say that a married person who exhibits love and moderation and practices almsgiving is equal to a monk or consecrated virgin who exhibits the same virtues and gives alms in equal proportion. In this case, because of the added observance of virginity, John would regard the monk as having achieved a higher status, but on the scale of virtue, John is consistent in holding that almsgiving carries greater weight than virginity.<sup>27</sup> He thus contends that almsgiving is a virtue equally open to and expected of monks and married laity because both groups are capable of engaging in it and both groups will be judged by God on this criterion.

## 2 Monks as Exemplars of Almsgiving in John's Homilies on Matthew

Although John holds both the monks and married people to the same standard when it comes to almsgiving, it appears from several of his homilies on Matthew that the monks are doing a much better job in this area. This provides

25 *hom. in Mt.* 46.4 (PG 58, 480).

26 *hom. in Mt.* 46.4 (PG 58, 481).

27 See *hom. in 1 Cor.* 30.4 (PG 61, 254), where John explains that there are "many degrees of virtue" within the church and first lists virgins, followed by widows, and then married people, suggesting that there is a hierarchy of honor among the laity, with virgins at the top and married people at the bottom. See also Claire Elayne Salem, "Sanity, Insanity, and Man's Being as Understood by St. John Chrysostom," 205, who suggests that almsgiving, rather than being the highest virtue in John's eyes, was more of a "lowest common denominator." In other words, this virtue was one of the most basic virtues for Christians according to John.

yet another opportunity to create unity among monks and married persons living in the city because the monks can act as mentors for the married laity in how to live for the common good (κοινωφελῶς) and to serve the less fortunate.<sup>28</sup> As several scholars have noticed, John frequently holds up the monks as exemplars of virtue, urging the members of his congregation in Antioch to visit the monks in their mountain abodes outside the city.<sup>29</sup> Some have also noted that one of the qualities John hopes his congregants will pick up from the monks is their concern for the poor. Samantha L. Miller has argued that the monastic virtue John especially wants the members of his congregation to emulate is detachment. She asserts, "It is because of their choice against wealth that monks become paragons of the Christian life, for poverty engenders simplicity and detachment, which in turn foster virtue ..."<sup>30</sup> I would add that it is not only the monks' detachment that John wants the members of his congregation to imitate, but their shared way of life, equality, unity, and service to the poor. Although the families in his congregation may live in separate houses from one another, they can still exhibit a communal spirit through almsgiving and respecting those of a lower social class than themselves.

While in his earlier treatises, *Comparatio regis et monachis* and *Adversus Oppugnatores*, John stresses the acquisition of self-control as one of the main goals of monastic life, once he becomes a pastor, his ideas on both the value and dangers of monasticism begin to widen.<sup>31</sup> He continues to emphasize the monks' moderation and self-control, but also stresses the social virtues of monasticism, such as equality, holding all things in common, and brotherly love. Likewise, he begins to see separation from the world as a potential danger of monasticism in that it can predispose one to being so consumed with his own salvation that he neglects saving others. In *Adversus Oppugnatores* 1.7, written around 375 during his ascetical period, John had defended

28 See *hom. in Mt.* 78.3 (PG 58, 714) for John's use of the term κοινωφελῶς. Although the use of the term "common good" is relatively recent in English, I think this is the most concise and etymologically precise translation of the word. The term can also be translated as "for the general good or benefit." See Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 764.

29 See Aideen Hartney, "Men, Women, and Money—John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City," (2001), 528–529; Margaret Mitchell, "Silver Chamber Pots and Other Goods Which Are Not Good," (2004), 89; Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity* (2006), 131–133; and Samantha L. Miller, "John's Monks as Living Exhortations to Poverty and the Rich Life," *Greek Theological Review* 58 (2013): 79–98 (82–83) (hereafter, abbreviated as "John's Monks").

30 Miller, "John's Monks," 79–80.

31 For self-control (σωφροσύνη) as a monastic virtue, see *comp.* 2 (PG 47, 389); *oppugn.* 3.7 (PG 47, 359–360); and *oppugn.* 3.11 (PG 47, 367).

not only those who fled to the monasteries to save themselves, but also, the monks who were assisting the young men in their flight.<sup>32</sup> Seventeen or eighteen years later, after John had been a priest for at least six years, he clearly denounces this flight made under the pretext of saving oneself from the corruption of the city. In *hom. in 1 Cor.* 6.4, he addresses those who have fled as if they are present in his audience: "Now how much better were it for you to become duller, and gain others, than remaining on high to overlook your perishing brothers?"<sup>33</sup> According to John in this instance, withdrawing from the world is nothing else than shirking one's spiritual responsibility to save as many people as possible.<sup>34</sup>

It appears, however, that not all the monks in Antioch had completely isolated themselves from society, but were near enough for people in the city to visit them from time to time. According to John, these monks were not self-absorbed, but demonstrated an active concern for one another and for the marginalized of society. Most scholars date the homilies on Matthew to 390, four years after John had been ordained a priest.<sup>35</sup> During these years, as he became acquainted with some of the more common sins among his church members, such as jealousy, strife, greed, and selfish ambition, he remembered the communal way of life of monasticism and thought a witnessing of this lifestyle by his congregants might help to counter these sins. Obviously, John is painting an ideal picture of the monks' way of life. Day-to-day monastic life was surely not as angelic as he describes it. Yet, John's frequent commendation of the neighboring monks to his Antiochene congregants shows that he sincerely believed the former could serve as a model for the latter in their communal lifestyle and care for the poor.

32 PG 47, 328. As was mentioned in chapter two, Noel Lenski, "Valens and the Monks," 103–107, dates Book 1 of this treatise to 375.

33 PG 61, 54. Kelly judges the *Homilies in 1 Corinthians* to have been delivered by Chrysostom in 392–393. See *Golden Mouth*, 91.

34 See also Jan R. Stenger, "Where to Find Philosophy? Spatiality in John Chrysostom's Counter to Greek *Paideia*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24.2 (Summer 2016): 173–198 (195), who makes a similar point based on John's comments in *sac.* 6.5–8 (SC 272, 322–330). He states that in this passage, John makes it clear that "public engagement of priests on behalf of others ranks above undisturbed ascetic existence because it ... proves beneficial not only for oneself." Stenger's wider point in the essay is that John invests the concept of Christian philosophy with spatial qualities to make monastic ideals and values available to his urban congregation (177).

35 For the dating of this series of homilies, see Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 90; and Mayer, *Provenance*, 267, entry for CPG 4424, for a summary of the dates assigned to this work by various authors.



In *hom. in Mt.* 69.3–4, John lifts up the monks to his congregation as an example of a community in which worldly distinctions have been eliminated. In this context, John is discussing Matt. 22:1–14, the parable of the wedding banquet where the man is cast out because he was not wearing a wedding garment. He points to the monk clad in his “garments of hair” and “sackcloth” as the one who is clothed in the true wedding garment.<sup>36</sup> He then mounts on a long discourse of the pleasant and simple way of life of the monks. He mentions their individual huts, their simple diet of bread and water, and that some of them do not even have a roof over their heads, but sleep under the sky. John remarks that their table is “pure from all covetousness and full of self-denial” so that the angels dine with them as they did with Abraham.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, his hearers “follow after all covetousness” and imitate the ways of wolves and leopards.<sup>38</sup>

There is no master and slave there; all are slaves, all are free men. And do not think the saying to be a riddle, for they are slaves of one another, and masters of one another .... On account of this, whenever anyone clothed in honor should come to them, then all pride is utterly reproved. For the farmer there, and the servant experienced in worldly affairs, sit near the general .... A king is nothing among them, a governor is nothing; but just as we laugh at children playing at these things, so also do they spit upon the fiery passion of those who strut about.<sup>39</sup>

John emphasizes here the abolishment of distinctions and the virtues of humility and mutual respect that he wants the members of his congregation to observe in the monks and imitate.<sup>40</sup> He holds up the equality and humility of the monks as running counter to the covetousness and pride of his congregants. Although this passage does not explicitly mention care for the poor, these words could serve as encouragement to John’s audience not to look down on the poor, but to regard them as sharing equal dignity with themselves. John’s point is to help his congregants recognize that wealth and worldly status do not elevate them to a position of prestige in God’s eyes and that they should both serve and submit to their fellow humans as a way of restoring the harmony that God intended his creation to enjoy.

36 *hom. in Mt.* 69.3 (PG 58, 651).

37 *hom. in Mt.* 69.3 (PG 58, 653).

38 *hom. in Mt.* 69.4 (PG 58, 654).

39 *hom. in Mt.* 69.4 (PG 58, 653–654).

40 For a more in-depth discussion of the virtues of humility and equality in John’s thought, see Maxwell, *Simplicity and Humility in Late Antique Christian Thought*, esp. 144–155.

One of the best examples of how the monks serve as exemplars in their care for the poor and suffering is in *hom. in Mt.* 72.3–4. John exhorts his audience to "go to the tents of the holy men, the mountains," in order to observe the equality and unity among the monks and that they hold all things in common.

There he is great who seizes the lowly task. There is not mine and yours, but this saying is banished that is a cause of countless wars. And why are you amazed if there be one way of life and table and apparel for all, wherever indeed there is even one soul to all, not with regard to substance only ... but with regard to love .... There is no wealth and poverty there, no glory and dishonor; how then should senselessness and arrogance find an entrance?<sup>41</sup>

From this passage, it seems that all distinctions among the monks have been eliminated. They share all things.<sup>42</sup> They are unified as one soul in love. This is possibly an allusion to Acts 4:32, to be discussed in more detail below, which talks about the Christian community in Jerusalem being of one heart and one soul. No one is wealthy or poor. No one ranks above another. This equality thus makes it easier for the monks to exercise humility. John describes their various menial tasks, such as working the soil, making sackcloth, weaving baskets, and doing other sorts of work with their hands, and explains that these jobs further assist them in acquiring humility.<sup>43</sup> The monks most likely sold some of these handicrafts and donated the proceeds to the poor. In *hom. in Mt.* 68.3, John, again in a passage praising the virtues and lifestyle of the monks, remarks that after their prayers, "each one goes out to his work, gathering from this a large profit for the needy."<sup>44</sup> It is also possible that the monks donated some of their garden produce to the poor or sold it to others and gave the profits to the needy.<sup>45</sup>

John also mentions the monks' willingness to dine with the poor and to tend to the sick and disabled. In *hom. in Mt.* 72.4, a few lines down from the passage

41 *hom. in Mt.* 72.3–4 (PG 58, 671).

42 See Margaret Mitchell, "Silver Chamber Pots and Other Goods Which Are Not Good," 96, note 25, who points out that this idea of "mine (ἐμός)" being the source of all evil in society was prevalent in Greek philosophy, going back, at least, to Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 23.65) and possibly, even to Plato's *Republic* (5.462C).

43 *hom. in Mt.* 72.4 (PG 58, 672).

44 *hom. in Mt.* 68.3 (PG 58, 644).

45 See also, Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 90–99, especially 95–99. Finn contrasts the disputed practice of monks redistributing alms given to them with the accepted practice of monks giving to the poor from the proceeds of their own manual labor.

quoted above, John continues his panegyric: “And they associate with the poor and crippled, and their tables are full of these guests; because of this, they are worthy of the heavens. And one treats the wounds of those who have leprosy, another leads the blind by the hand, another carries him who has a lame leg.”<sup>46</sup> If the monks dwelt on the outskirts of the city, the disabled would not have been able to travel to them; therefore, it appears that in addition to manual labor, such as farming and gardening, making sackcloth, and weaving baskets, some of the monks worked in a *πτωχοτροφεῖον* (hostel for the poor) or *νοσοκομεῖον* (hostel for the sick).<sup>47</sup> Perhaps, they assisted in the shelter for the poor (*τῶν πτωχῶν καταγώγιον*) on the edge of Antioch that John mentions in his treatise, *Ad Stagirium*. He comments that those suffering from “chronic illnesses” could be seen at this location.<sup>48</sup>

Not much is known concerning monks’ care for the sick and infirm in Antioch, but according to the *Vita* of Alexander the Sleepless, the wandering ascetic established a *ξενοδοχεῖον* (hostel for strangers) in Antioch during the fifth century with the aid of the city’s wealthy Christians.<sup>49</sup> Monastic involvement in hostels for the sick and poor in other Eastern cities, such as Sebaste and Constantinople, is well attested. Epiphanius states that Eustasthius, a well-known leader of monasticism, built a *ξενοδοχεῖον* in Sebaste that served those with disfiguring or crippling diseases, and Sozomen reports that in the mid-fourth century, an ascetic deacon named Marathonius founded several monastic communities within the city and was a “zealous superintendent of the poor.”<sup>50</sup> The patriarch Macedonius (342–346 and 351–360) formed an alliance with him and later ordained him bishop of Nicomedia.<sup>51</sup> Later, after John became bishop of Constantinople, Palladius says that he founded his own *νοσοκομεῖα* and appointed “doctors, cooks, and kind workers among the celibate ones (*ἀγά-*

46 *hom. in Mt.* 72.4 (PG 58, 671).

47 I avoid equating the Greek *νοσοκομεῖον* with a hospital as it is unclear if the *νοσοκομεῖα* always provided medical care or simply housed, fed, and tended to the sick. See Andrew T. Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital: Christian Monasticism & the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), esp. 100–142, for the origins of the hospital as well as for the criteria for identifying an ancient hospital. He lists inpatient facilities, the provision of professional medical care, and charitable care for those who could not pay as the defining characteristics of a hospital and contends that Basil’s medical facilities in Caesarea met all these requirements.

48 *Stag.* 3.13 (PG 47, 490).

49 *v. Alex. Acoem.* 38 (PO 6, 688).

50 Epiphanius, *haer.* 75.1 in *Epiphanius III. Panarion haer.* 65–80; *De Fide* (GCS 37, 333); and Sozomen, *h. e.* 4.20.2 (GCS, n.s. 4, 170). See also Sozomen, *h. e.* 4.27.4 (GCS, n.s. 4, 184).

51 Sozomen, *h. e.* 4.20 (GCS, n.s. 4, 170).

μων)" to work in them.<sup>52</sup> Both Macedonius' and John's partnership with monks in serving the poor and sick demonstrate that in addition to bringing monks and laity together, almsgiving could also serve as a unifying force between the monks and clergy.

### 3 John's Instructions That Monks, Female Virgins, and Widows Should Give Alms

Just as in his *Homilies on Matthew*, where John praises monks who give alms and work to serve the afflicted, so too in other works, he is critical of monks who do not perform manual labor to provide for their own needs and the needs of others. In his *hom. in 1 Thess.* 6.1, John is commenting on 1 Thess. 4:11, in which the apostle Paul exhorts the Thessalonian Christians not to be idle, but to work with their hands. This passage, to be discussed more in the next chapter, may have been directed at the Messalians, a group of monks considered heretical by some Christians, who thought it justifiable to beg so that they could devote themselves to "spiritual work." John emphasizes that in 1 Thess. 4:11, Paul specifically says to work "with your hands." "See how he destroys every excuse by them, saying, 'with your hands?' But does one perform fasts with his hands? Or all-night vigils? Or sleeping on the ground? No one may say this. But he speaks concerning spiritual work. For it is truly spiritual, working to offer to others, and nothing is equal to this."<sup>53</sup> It is clear from John's remarks here that not only is he opposed to monks begging if they are able to work and provide for their own needs, but he also expects monks to provide for the needs of others. In this homily, it does not seem that he is addressing these begging ascetics directly but addressing members of his audience who might give alms to this group.<sup>54</sup>

Although John does not ever appear to direct his discourse on almsgiving to monks, he does direct it toward female virgins on at least one occasion. In *poenit.* 3.3, after lauding the glorious achievement of virginity in some detail, he laments the situation of those who are virgins but love money and seems to be addressing virgins present in his audience. "But virgin, you who have renounced this life and been crucified to it, you love money! Would that you

52 Palladius, *v. Chrys.* 5 (SC 341, 122). It is unclear whether these celibates were male or female or a combination of both.

53 PG 62, 429–430. See also Caner's discussion of this passage in *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 171–172.

54 For the laity's preference to give to ascetics over the involuntary poor, see Mayer, "Poverty and generosity," 149–154.

had desired a man, and the crime would not have been so great! For, you would have desired matter as the same substance as yourself. But now, the condemnation is greater because you desired foreign matter.”<sup>55</sup> Although it could be argued that he is speaking in general terms concerning one of the five foolish virgins mentioned in Matt. 25:1–13, which he has just finished discussing, and not directing his discourse to any particular group of virgins in his audience, a few lines later, he seems to be mourning the choices of real rather than hypothetical virgins. After speaking briefly of excuses married women offer for not giving alms, he again turns his focus toward those who have embraced celibacy: “However, you who have no children and have been crucified to this life, why do you gather money?”<sup>56</sup>

In *hom. in 1 Tim. 5:9* (*Vidua eligatur*), thought to have been delivered in Antioch, John brings up the parable of the ten virgins once more, but this time, applies the lesson to widows.<sup>57</sup> Although not explicitly addressing widows in the audience, his words seem to imply that there were some widows who believed that simply not marrying a second time was a high enough state of virtue to achieve. John reasons, however, that if the virginity of the five foolish virgins was not enough to allow them into the bridal chamber, the widows’ remaining unmarried will not suffice to save them. Referring to Paul’s list of requirements in 1 Tim. 5:3–16 for a widow to receive financial assistance from the church, he expounds upon the apostle’s words:

It is not sufficient to say only the most important thing, “that a wife have only one husband,” but to teach that a widow not only must not marry a second time, but flourish in good works—in almsgiving, in philanthropy, and in caring for strangers. For if virginity did not profit the virgins (and virginity is much greater than widowhood), but they departed after the fire of their lamps had been extinguished, being dishonored because they did not have the fruit of almsgiving and philanthropy to show, this is so much truer for widows.<sup>58</sup>

This passage indicates that not only married people in John’s congregations esteemed virginity and celibacy more than other virtues, but widows may have held this assumption as well. This belief could cause division in two ways. The

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55 PG 49, 296.

56 Ibid.

57 For the provenance of this homily, see Mayer, *Provenance*, 434. See also 265 in this same work for a summary of the various dates assigned to the homily, ranging from 387–393.

58 *Vid. elig.* (PG 51, 326).

virgins and widows might be tempted to look down on those in the married state and to think they have already reached the summit of virtue, and the married people might also grow lax in their pursuit of virtue because certain esteemed paths to holiness, such as virginity, are not open to them.

Not much is known concerning the financial situation of the virgins and widows in John's congregations in Antioch, but he does mention in *hom. in Mt.* 66.3 that the church supported 3,000 widows and consecrated virgins.<sup>59</sup> As these virgins and widows received some sort of financial assistance from the church, it is safe to assume that many of them were poor, themselves. Also, in *hom. in 1 Cor.* 30, John describes some of the widows of the church going to bed hungry and suffering from the cold.<sup>60</sup> The situation in Constantinople, however, was likely different. The widow Olympias who had founded a monastery during the episcopacy of John's predecessor, Nectarius, was quite wealthy and became John's patroness. According to Olympias' *Vita*, there were two-hundred fifty virgins and widows in her monastery, and it is known that several of these ladies were also well-off.<sup>61</sup> As this monastery had a private passage directly to the narthex of the Great Church of Constantinople, it is almost certain that at least some of these women formed a large part of John's audience.<sup>62</sup> Of course, this does not mean that there were also not poor virgins and widows present in John's audience, such as the servants of Olympias and the other aristocratic women in the monastery.<sup>63</sup>

Whether wealthy or poor, however, John is firm in his directive that virgins and widows are not to trust in their celibate status to grant them admission into heaven. They must produce the fruit of almsgiving and philanthropy. While the married members of John's congregations are tempted to be complacent in their pursuit of virtue because the path of virginity is not open to them, the celibate members of John's flock tend to be smug because they have already attained virginity or have chosen to renounce marriage after widowhood. Both

59 PG 58, 630.

60 *hom. in 1 Cor.* 30.4 (PG 61, 255).

61 See *v. Olymp.* 6 and 7 (sc 13 bis, 418 and 420), which mentions three aristocratic sisters related to Olympias, Elisanthia, Martyria, and Palladia, who joined the monastery and whom John later ordained as deaconesses as well as Olympia, a niece of Olympias, who also joined the monastery and was of senatorial background.

62 *v. Olymp.* 6 (sc 3 bis, 418).

63 See *Ibid.*, where after mentioning all these aristocratic women, the text states that they entered with "all the rest." Wendy Mayer, "Constantinopolitan Women in John's Circle," *Vigiliae Christianae* 53 (1999): 265–288 (268), understands this to mean the ladies' relatives and female servants as Olympias had brought in a large number of her own family and servants when she started the monastery.

groups mistakenly think that virginity is the highest Christian achievement, but John consistently maintains that almsgiving, not virginity, is the “queen of the virtues.”<sup>64</sup>

#### 4 Almsgiving as Creating Unity and Interdependence among the Laity

As mentioned in chapter one, John expects all Christians to participate in almsgiving, regardless of wealth or social status, and often brings in the examples of biblical widows (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4; and 1 Kings 17) to make this point. He also illustrates this lesson with the parable of the talents in Matt. 25:14–30, interpreting the talents as each person’s ability. Specifically, he mentions the ability to give money, the ability to provide patronage, and the ability to teach. Even if the poor are not capable of giving the same amount or perhaps are not even capable of providing any material aid, he believes they are capable of giving in some way. In this way, almsgiving is an activity that provides equal opportunity for his congregants in regard to attaining virtue. As both rich and poor have the ability to give alms and in light of the fact that almsgiving is one of the highest virtues according to John, both are capable of attaining the same height of holiness. Obviously, John maintains that attachment to wealth is a hindrance to attaining virtue; therefore, if the rich hold on to their wealth, the poor definitely have an advantage over them. The poor, however, may also have an attachment to wealth by coveting what they do not have and envying those better off than themselves.<sup>65</sup> The poverty of the poor does not save them, nor make them virtuous. Their salvation and virtue come through bearing their suffering nobly, as did Lazarus, being content, and showing mercy to the extent that they are able.<sup>66</sup>

Almsgiving also equalizes the relationship between the donor and recipient of alms because it creates a relationship of interdependence and a bond of friendship between the two parties. At times, it even raises the recipient above the donor as the recipient’s function is more vital. In *hom. in 2 Cor.* 17.2, John is admonishing those who are afraid to give for fear of becoming poor themselves and thus, dependent on others. John tells them that if they are not willing to

64 *poenit.* 3.1 (PG 49, 293).

65 See Miller, “John’s Monks,” 94.

66 See *exp. in Ps.* 128:1 (PG 55, 367–368). See also Wendy Mayer, “John Chrysostom’s Use of the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19–31),” *Scrinium. Revue de patrologie, d’hagiographie critique, et histoire ecclésiastique* 4 (2008): 45–59, esp. 54 and 57.

depend on others, they might as well die. He points out how all members of a society are dependent on one another: "Do you not see that we all stand in need of one another? The soldier of the artisan, the artisan of the merchant, the merchant of the gardener, the slave of the free man, the master of the servant, the poor person of the rich, the rich person of the poor, he that does not work of him that gives alms, he that gives of him that receives."<sup>67</sup> Of all these, the poor person fulfills the greatest need as she provides an opportunity for the others to distribute their alms, a work which assists their salvation. "For the one who receives alms fulfills the greatest need, a need greater than any. For if there were no poor, the greater part of our salvation would be overthrown, in that we should have no place to lay down our money. So that even the poor person, who seems to be the most useless of all, is the most useful of all."<sup>68</sup> He goes on to comment that the poor person is also the least dependent upon others. The poor person is only dependent on others for food and clothes, but the rich are dependent on a number of people to help manage their possessions and to ensure their lofty position—people to oversee their houses and lands, imposts, wages, rank, safety, honor, and subordinates as well as on magistrates, merchants, and shopkeepers. In this homily, John points out that every person in the community has a role to fulfill, but especially the poor person.<sup>69</sup> In this context, almsgiving exalts the status of the poor over the rich. Although he is not speaking specifically about the Christian body, but generally of the wider society, John would be most interested in creating this relationship of interdependence among the members of his own congregation.

This idea is consistent with his application of Paul's statements in 1 Cor. 12:22–25 about the weaker members of Christ's body being accorded greater honor in order to prevent divisions. John uses this passage to explain that just as there is diversity in the body, there is diversity in the church, and this diversity is necessary in order for the body to exist. He further explains that because the church is a body, it is one, and it is this oneness that makes it possible for the members to share an "equality of honor (ἰσότητις)." <sup>70</sup>

67 PG 61, 520.

68 Ibid.

69 See Silke Sitzler, "Identity: The Indigent and the Wealthy in the Homilies of John Chrysostom," *Vigiliae Christianae* 69 (2009): 468–479 (476) who argues that John elevates the poor as gatekeepers to make them acceptable clients for the wealthier members of his congregation. Sitzler makes a good point, but he seems to assume that all of John's congregation consisted of wealthy people. As discussed earlier in this chapter, John's audience most likely was much more diverse economically.

70 *hom. in 1 Cor.* 30.3 (PG 61, 253).



In the passage in 1 Corinthians, Paul discusses that as the eye needs the hand and the head needs the feet, the eye and head should not look down upon the hands and the feet. Although the eye and head are the stronger, more presentable members, the weaker members, such as the hands and feet, are surrounded with more honor and treated with greater propriety. John expands this analogy of the weaker members to include hair, remarking on how the face would lose its beauty and the eye its protection if one were to remove the eyebrows and eyelashes. Likewise, reasons John, the poor, who are like the “eyelashes” or “weaker members” and seem to be the least useful, are the most indispensable. After briefly exhorting the stronger members of the church, such as the virgins and those who have renounced all their possessions, not to despise the married and those who have not renounced everything, John exclaims: “What is more insignificant than those who beg? And yet, even these fulfill the greatest need in the church, riveted to the doors of the sanctuary and presenting one of its greatest ornaments. And without these, there would be no completing the fullness of the church.”<sup>71</sup> A few lines later, John reveals what this “greatest need” is. He recalls in Acts 6, how the apostles provided for the widows among their number and indicates that, at least, some of the widows in his own congregation in Antioch were among the poor. He chides his audience for being tight-fisted toward the widows, but praises the widows for blessing even those who give but an obol. John explains that the widows could live in luxury if they chose to disregard their salvation and become “pimps and panderers.” Instead, however, they “sit throughout the whole day, preparing a medicine of salvation” for their stingy donors.<sup>72</sup> It seems in this instance, therefore, that the role played by the poor, including the widows, is to pray for their donors. This, in John’s eyes, is a greater service than supplying the material needs of the poor. Thus, once again, John presents the poor recipient of alms as more essential and as playing a greater role in the church than the rich donor.<sup>73</sup>

John also presents almsgiving as creating a bond of friendship between the donor and recipient. In *hom in 1Cor.* 32.5, John indicates that God instituted almsgiving not to provide for the needs of the poor, but to bind people together in charity. God, being all-powerful, could have provided for the poor through some other means, but in his wisdom and in his love for humanity, he commanded his followers to give alms that they might unite with their fellow human beings in caring for one another.

71 *hom. in 1Cor.* 30.4 (PG 61, 254).

72 *hom. in 1Cor.* 30.4 (PG 61, 255).

73 See also Blake Leyerle, “John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money,” (1994), 41–42, who makes this same point using different passages from John’s corpus.

On this account, almsgiving has been ordained by God. For, God was able to sustain the poor without this, but so that he might bind us together in love and that we might be warm toward each other, he commanded them to be fed by us .... For since it is customary for benefactors to love those who are benefited by them, and it is proper for those who receive good to feel affection towards their benefactors; he laid down this precept, creating a bond of friendship.<sup>74</sup>

Here, there is no financial language, no commercial imagery, no hierarchy among those who give and receive. The benefit of almsgiving in this passage is that of bringing together two humans who otherwise would have remained apart. The relationship and benefit are mutual. Both donor and recipient receive the benefit of friendship. In addition, this benefit is not limited to Christian donors and recipients. Almsgiving binds together any two humans whether one or both or neither are Christians. Presumably, however, since the majority of John's audience would have been Christians and he wants all people to become part of the church, his ideal donor is a Christian.

In addition, as I discussed in chapter three, John sees almsgiving as bringing down the barriers caused by inequalities in wealth and social status. This would further serve to unite the members of his congregation. He mentions the first Christian community in Jerusalem from Acts 4:32–35 where the believers were "of one heart and one soul" as a model for his own body of believers. This unity, according to John, was "the fruit of almsgiving."<sup>75</sup> The Christians in Acts 4 held all things in common, and no one claimed anything as his own. Those who owned properties and lands sold them and brought the profits to the apostles, who distributed the money according to each person's need. As in the case of the monks, sharing one's resources removes the barriers caused by disparities in wealth and social class and results in the union of souls. Again, although John does not specify that the recipients of alms are Christians, this argument would be effective in creating unity among the "enrolled poor (τῶν ἐγγεγραμμένων πενήτων)" and the donors within his congregation, as presumably, part of the latter's contributions would go to assist the church's own needy members.<sup>76</sup>

74 PG 61, 270–271.

75 See Chp. 3, pp. 88–90 and *hom. in Tit.* 6.3 (PG 62, 698).

76 See *hom. in 1 Cor.* 21 (PG 61, 179) for mention of the "enrolled poor" as well as Chp. 1, p. 38.

## 5 Conclusion

John promoted almsgiving as a unifying activity through which all the members of his congregation—celibate, married, rich, and poor—could strive for virtue. Although those who were married could not attain the crown of virginity, they could contend equally with the monks and virgins in almsgiving. The married members of John's congregation thought that because they were not monks, priests, virgins, or widows, God would not hold them to the same high standard of virtue. John, however, sought to correct this view and offered almsgiving as a way for married people to participate in the communal lifestyle of the monks. There was no need for them, according to John, to profess virginity, observe rigorous fasts, or spend the night in long vigils to attain this degree of holiness. They simply had to imitate the monks in their concern for the poor and suffering. John maintained that the observance of strict asceticism did not please God nearly as much as showing mercy to the poor. Almsgiving, therefore, was an activity in which married Christians could rise to the level of the monks.

Almsgiving was also a means by which to humble the monks and virgins who mistakenly trusted in their virginity alone to save them. On the contrary, according to John, the lamp of virginity was useless without the oil of almsgiving. The monks and virgins as well as married people would be judged by God primarily on how they treated Christ in the person of the poor, not according to their marital status.

Similarly, John employed almsgiving as a way to elevate the poor within his congregations. He contended that the poor recipients of alms actually provided a greater service than the rich donors because they offered the rich an opportunity to atone for their sins while the rich only provided the poor with perishable money or food. John, however, also expected even the poorest members of the church to give alms through their resources and talents. Poverty neither granted one favored status before God nor decreased one's ability to advance in virtue by contributing to the common good.

Almsgiving also united monks and married people by providing them with a joint task, in which the monks could serve as mentors for the married Christians. It further united the rich and poor because it created a bond of friendship and a relationship of equality between the donor and recipient, much like that which existed among the monks. By providing equal opportunities for the acquisition of virtue and strengthening unity among the members of his flock, John would have been able to solidify his position against other Christian and religious groups with whom he competed for the title of "patron of the poor." This will be the subject of the following chapter.

## Almsgiving as a Means of Earning Credibility: John as Patron of the Poor

Raising money for the poor, establishing various philanthropic organizations, such as hostels for the sick and poor, and caring for the weakest members of society, such as widows and orphans, was not only a way to fulfill biblical commandments. It was also a means of advancement within the church and a way to increase one's own power and influence in an age of quickly-shifting power structures and competition to define orthodoxy. By the fourth century, Christian bishops had acquired a reputation for patronage, patronage of their own members, such as consecrated virgins, widows, and orphans, but also of the poor, including those who did not belong to the church.

In *Power and Persuasion* and *Poverty and Leadership*, Peter Brown describes how bishops in the fourth through sixth centuries helped to transform late Roman society from a civic model to an economic model and how they used their care for the poor to promote themselves as major urban patrons.<sup>1</sup> He also speaks of how the local bishop acted as a spokesman for and “governor of the poor.”<sup>2</sup> Claudia Rapp has similarly called attention to how identical language was used to praise bishops and governors and how bishops were expected to exemplify the same virtues as those in civic leadership, such as prudence, justice, temperance, and courage.<sup>3</sup> Most recently, Richard Finn has pointed out how bishops were charged with the “leadership [or patronage] of the needy” (ἡ προστασία τῶν δεομένων), but he qualifies Brown's thesis by discussing how bishops could also lose power and prestige if they failed to fulfill this duty.<sup>4</sup> In addition, he contends that both cooperation with the Christian community in caring for the poor and competition with other clergy, monks, Jews, and Greco-Roman euergetism limited the ability of the bishop to use almsgiving as a means to promote himself as a civic patron.<sup>5</sup> While it is hard to ascertain

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- 1 Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, 101–102; and idem, *Poverty and Leadership*, 8, 77.
  - 2 *Poverty and Leadership*, 45–73, 79.
  - 3 Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 166–171.
  - 4 Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 203–204 and 219–220.
  - 5 Ibid., 260–266. See also Mayer, “Poverty and society,” 483, who maintains that the “less well

exactly how successful bishops were in using their “patronage” of the poor to gain civic prominence, something that surely varied on both a regional and an individual basis, Brown is correct that bishops in late antiquity did seek to enhance their reputation and authority through their promotion of almsgiving. Finn is likewise correct that they competed with one another and others for this honor.

Bishops from both the eastern and western parts of the empire in the fourth and fifth centuries employed the language of patronage to describe their duties and virtues. Gregory of Nazianzus hails Athanasius as a “patron of widows (χῆραι τὸν προστάτην);” Isidore of Pelusium speaks of the “patronage of the poor (πενήτων προστασίας)” as one of the central duties of a bishop; and John, in his treatise, *De Sacerdotio*, uses the term “patronage (προστασία)” when he speaks of the duties of the bishop and priest in caring for the financial and spiritual needs of the widows and orphans.<sup>6</sup> John also presents himself as an ambassador or intercessor for the poor in *De Eleemosyna*, a homily preached in Antioch in the winter of 387. He describes how he has just come from the marketplace and has passed by the beggars, some missing hands, some missing eyes, some with skin ulcerations, and others with incurable wounds. He goes on to discuss how the poor are in particular need during winter as food is scarcer and the temperatures are too cold to sleep outside. Then, as he often does, he holds up the example of the Apostle Paul to his congregants, hailing him as a “patron and guardian of those living in poverty (προστάτην καὶ κηδεμόνα τῶν ἐν πενίᾳ ζώντων).”<sup>7</sup>

While the primary oversight of the church's funds rested with the bishop, the priests and deacons also played a major role in collecting and dispensing these funds to the poor. According to the *Apostolic Constitutions* and the *Apostolic*

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established ideal of public benefaction of the economic poor” was “still overshadowed by a ‘civic’ model of benefaction.”

6 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 21.10 (SC 270, 132); Isidore of Pelusium, *ep.* 1077/*ep.* 3.277 (PG 78, 953); and John Chrysostom, *sac.* 3.12 (SC 272, 200). See also Eusebius of Caesarea, *m. P.* 11.22 (GCS 6/2, 943), who commends the ascetic, Seleucus, as caring for the poor like a “bishop (ἐπίσκοπος).” All of these are cited in Finn. See above, note 4.

7 *elem.* 1 (PG 51, 261). Here, John references Gal. 2:10, in which Paul recounts how Peter had requested of him and Barnabas that, in their mission to the Gentiles, they continue to remember the poor. Paul then adds that this was “the very thing I was eager to do.” John points out, however, that Paul used similar language to show his concern for the poor in all his epistles. He states, “It is impossible to find a single epistle that does not have this exhortation [to care for the poor].” (PG 51, 262). See also Margaret M. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 318, who comments on how John highlighted Paul's concern for the poor, specifically through Paul's mention of this group in all his letters.

*Canons*, the bishops relied on the support of their priests and deacons in visiting those who were in need and in distributing alms.<sup>8</sup> Thus, if a deacon or priest was a known defender of the poor, this could aid his ascendancy in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. While in some cases, the deacon may have solicited alms, the primary duty of persuading the congregants to part with their money fell to the priests and bishops—the ones delivering the homilies.<sup>9</sup> As John served in all these roles, he would have felt the pressure to act as patron of the poor, and increasingly so as he moved up in ecclesiastical rank.<sup>10</sup> In fact, his success in gaining a reputation as “patron of the poor” was likely a major factor in helping him to secure the patriarchate of Constantinople in 397.<sup>11</sup>

Priests and bishops faced competition in collecting alms for the poor both within and without their ranks. Clergy within the same Christian group competed with one another, but they also competed with different Christian groups in establishing charitable organizations, such as hostels for the sick, poor, and strangers. In some places, they competed with monks from their own Christian sect in collecting and distributing alms for the poor, but they also faced outside competition from non-Christian groups and forms of giving, such as the Jews and Greco-Roman euergetism. The Jews, at least in Palestine, were known for their care for the poor, particularly their establishment of soup kitchens (*tamhui*) and local charity funds (*quppah*) and providing housing

8 For the deacon's role in visiting the need and in distributing alms, see *Const. App.* 3.19 (SC 329, 160–162). For the role of the priest and deacon in distributing alms and the role of the bishop in overseeing this work, see *Can. App.* 41/*Const. App.* 8.47–41 (SC 336, 288). See also Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 36 and 77.

9 For the role of the deacon in soliciting alms, see *Ordo Eccl. App.* 23 in Alistair Stewart-Sykes, ed., *The Apostolic Church Order: The Greek Text with Introduction, Translation, and Annotation* (Strathfield, Australia: St. Paul's Publications, 2006), 90–104 at 102. Stewart-Sykes concludes on 75–79 that the order was finally redacted in Cappadocia, Asia, or West Syria in the early part of the third century and that the sources are from the second century and are of an Asian or Syrian provenance. See also Bradshaw, *Ancient Church Orders*, 88–89, for a summary of the work's dating and origin. For the duty of the priest/bishop in securing the donations, see John Chrysostom, *sac.* 3.12 (SC 272, 208). See also Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 36.

10 According to Pauline Allen and Wendy Mayer, “Through a Bishop's Eyes: Toward a Definition of Pastoral Care in Late Antiquity,” *Augustinianum* 40 (2000): 345–397, John, when bishop of Constantinople, preached at least weekly (368–369), and in regard to caring for the poor, although probably rarely interacting with this class directly, was nevertheless involved in establishing charitable institutions, staffing them, and working to secure and maintain patrons whose contributions supported these efforts (373–374).

11 See also Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 210, who comments on how Sisinius' reputation for providing for the poor helped him secure the bishopric of Constantinople in late 425 or early 426.

for strangers in the synagogue.<sup>12</sup> Greco-Roman euergetism, while not directed solely toward the poor, but toward Roman citizens, was a threat to Christian charity in that it diverted potentially large donations from wealthy Christians away from the church to large-scale building projects and entertainment venues.<sup>13</sup>

John dealt with all these competing sects at one or more points during his ecclesiastical career. In Antioch, there was a sizable population of Jews, toward which the members of his congregation were drawn, as well as several Christian groups. In Constantinople, John encountered competition in almsgiving from urban monks, and again, other Christian sects. He needed to stress almsgiving to his congregations in Antioch in order to rise to the rank of a bishop, but he also had to continue to promote it once he became bishop in order to establish his authority over monks and Christian groups he deemed heretical in Constantinople. Concurring with the general conclusions of Peter Brown, Richard Finn, Wendy Mayer, and Daniel Caner, I argue in this chapter that religious competition for patronage of the poor was yet another factor that led John to emphasize almsgiving in his homilies. It was important to John to establish his reputation as a defender of the poor and win the people's trust so they would heed his words on doctrinal and other theological matters. In making this argument, I give more attention to the particular contexts of Antioch and Constantinople during the late fourth and early fifth century, especially Antioch's large Jewish population, as well as John's relationship with specific individuals such as Isaac the monk and his patroness Olympias.

12 See *y. Pe'ah* 8.7, 21a; and Gregg E. Gardner, "Tamhui, The Soup Kitchen," and "Quppa, The Charity Fund," in *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 84–138.

13 For how Christian almsgiving both borrowed from and competed with Greco-Roman euergetism, see Finn, "Chapter 6: Christian and Classical," in *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 221–257, esp. 249. Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, abridged and introduction by Oswyn Murray, trans. Brian Pearce (London: Penguin, 1992), 31, (originally published as *Le pain et le cirque: sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* [Paris: Ed. de Seuil, 1976]), suggests that Christian charity replaced Greco-Roman euergetism rather than these practices existing side by side. From John's sermons, however, one can see that this was clearly not the case in fourth-century Antioch. See also Peter van Nuffelen, "Social Ethics and Moral Discourse in Late Antiquity," in *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for Twenty-first Century Christian Thought*, ed. Johan Leemans, Brian J. Matz, and John Verstraeten (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 45–63, esp. 57–62, who argues that the Christian virtue of *caritas* and the Greco-Roman virtue of *liberalitas* continued to exist as two poles of a shared discourse well into the sixth century.

## 1 Competition with Greco-Roman Euergetism

Libanius' *Oration* 11, an encomium delivered when his native city hosted the Olympic games in 356 CE, demonstrates that Greco-Roman euergetism still flourished in fourth-century Antioch. While praising the members of the city council, he describes the lavish outlay of expense of the *curiales* and *decuriones* in serving as patrons of their city as well as their joy in performing this civic duty.

Now it alone [the council] is the greatest and noblest among those anywhere ... They [the councilors] take their parents as teachers in showing affection for their city, and each one of them accepts, along with his property, that he has acquired his property for the common good .... They take more pleasure in spending money on the city than others do in earning money; they send forth these provisions without regard to cost to the point that, already, there is fear that they may be reduced to poverty, as they make expenditures to assist in manifold ways.<sup>14</sup>

Libanius goes on to list these various forms of expenditure: providing food during a time of famine, building public baths and theatres, and paying for the honor of having their own sons host games to entertain the people. Then, speaking of the horse races and gymnastic contests, likely the very shows put on by their sons when they made their debut into public life, he comments further on the extraordinary sums of money spent. "It is a contest for each of them, to surpass his predecessor in the performance of these duties, but to preclude his successor from competing with him, and always to put on a greater show than before .... Many people have often ... contracted expense upon expense .... The cause of this is a natural greatness of mind (μεγαλοφροσύνη)." <sup>15</sup> This excerpt allows one to see how interwoven this practice was with family status and patriotism and how it was viewed as both an honor and a civic responsibility.

Libanius was, no doubt, very qualified to speak on this practice as he was a member of the aristocracy and performed these duties himself. Although on this grand occasion, he speaks of the institution as being very time-honored and commendable, the reality was that the Roman government had by this

14 Libanius, *Or.* 11.133–134 in Richard Foerster, ed. Libanius, *Opera*, vol. 1.2 (Leipzig: Lipsiae, 1903, repr. Hildesheim, 1963), 480–481.

15 Libanius, *Or.* 11.136–138 in Foerster, ed., vol. 1.2, 482.



time extended the practice and made it compulsory, even for poorer members of the elite, punishing those who did not comply. In fact, Libanius, himself, would attempt to free his own son, Cimon, from the grip of the *curia* a few years later.<sup>16</sup>

John likewise paints a vivid picture of the practice of euergetism in Antioch, but from the point of view of the spectators and in less laudatory tones. In the first part of *De educandis liberis*, a homily delivered in Antioch in 388, he discourses against vanity and draws an example from daily life with which his audience would have been familiar: the euergetēs as he stands before the crowd in the theatre right before the show begins. John emphasizes the praise that the audience lavishes on him at this moment.

It's as if a single mouth sends forth one voice, all calling him protector and ruler of their common city (κηδεμόνα καλοῦντες καὶ προστάτην τῆς κοινῆς πόλεως) as they stretch out their hands to him. Next, they liken him to the greatest river of all, comparing the greatness and abundance of his munificence (τὸ τῆς φιλοτιμίας ἄδρὸν καὶ ἐκκεχυμένον) to the bounteous waters of the Nile; and they call him the Nile of gifts. Others, flattering him more, thinking this illustration of the Nile too small, pass by rivers and seas; bringing in the ocean, they say as it is among the waters, so is he in his lavish gifts (ἐν ταῖς φιλοτιμίαις), and they do not omit any form of praise .... Then the blessed man sits down among all of them, each of whom prays that he himself may become like that one and then die at once.<sup>17</sup>

On the financial risk involved in hosting these shows, John and Libanius agree. John goes on to say that despite this initial favor and almost worship from the audience, the crowds will quickly forget about the euergetēs, and possibly, even deride him when they see him begging on the street “after he has spent beyond his means.”<sup>18</sup> The reason for this is none other than envy, as John explains fur-

16 See A.F. Norman, ed. and trans. *Antioch as a Centre of Hellenic Culture as Observed by Libanius* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 32–33, n. 69 and P. Petit, *Libanius et la vie municipale à Antioche au iv<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.C.* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1955), 63 ff.

17 *educ lib.* 4 (sc 188, 74–78).

18 *educ lib.* 7 (sc 188, 80). As Geert Roskam, “John Chrysostom on Pagan Euergetism: A Reading of the First Part of *De inani gloria et de educandis liberis*,” *Sacris Erudiri* 53 (2014): 147–169 (153–154), concedes, the aorist participle here could be translated “if” instead of “after,” but in light of John’s strong rhetoric against euergetism in this passage, “after,” as Roskam also argues, is a more likely translation. Roskam also points out in this article that

ther down. "For, at the time when they hailed him, they were consumed with envy and thought it a consolation for their own domestic troubles that the man who had been so glorious was likely to be the most dishonored of all."<sup>19</sup>

This is, indeed, an intentionally bleak assessment that John gives of the euergetic system of his day.<sup>20</sup> He, like many other early Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries, such as Augustine, Ambrose, and Paulinus, disapproved of this tradition and used harsh rhetoric in denouncing it to the members of their respective flocks.<sup>21</sup> John typically presented Christian almsgiving and Greco-Roman euergetism as not only distinct, but opposing practices.<sup>22</sup> That does

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not all benefactors exhausted their fortunes in putting on these shows. While I concur with him on this point, I do not think we can, as he suggests, "presume that most rich benefactors proceeded with due caution and after careful deliberation (158)."

19 *educ. lib.* 7 (SC 188, 80–82).

20 See Roskam, "John Chrysostom on Pagan Euergetism," 155–164, who rightly contends by comparing John's remarks to pagan sources, some of which are also critical of euergetism, that the motivations of the benefactors were sometimes more noble, the expenditures were frequently more moderate, and the rewards to the patrons were often longer-lasting than John's portrayal of the situation in *De educandis liberis* suggests.

21 Augustine, Ambrose, and Paulinus all decry civic benefactions such as the games and the theatre and specifically present almsgiving as an alternative to these large expenditures. See Augustine, *Serm.* 21.10 (CCSL 41, 285–286); Ambrose, *De officiis* 2.109 (M. Testard, ed. *Les Devoirs* ii, 58–59); and Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 13.15 (CSEL 29, 96). See also Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 207–208.

22 Since Heinrik Bolkestein's monograph, *Wohltätigkeit und Armenpflege im Vorchristlichen Altertum* (Utrecht: A. Oosthoek Verlag, 1939; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1979), the scholarly consensus had been that Christian almsgiving was not in continuity with Greco-Roman euergetism. See also Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque*, 51 ff.; and Brown, *Ransom of the Soul*, 82 ff. Bolkestein, 101 and 150, maintains that Greco-Roman euergetism, unlike Christian and Jewish almsgiving, was not specifically directed toward the poor, but toward citizens and the deserving. He also demonstrates that charity toward the poor was not considered a virtue in the eyes of Greco-Roman pagans. Scholars such as Claude Lepelley, *Les cités de l'Afrique romaine au Bas-Empire*, vol. 1. Série Antiquité 80 (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1979), 384; idem., "Mélanie la Jeune, entre Rome, la Sicile et l'Afrique: les effets socialement pernicieux d'une forme extrême de l'ascétisme," *Kokalos* 43 (1997): 15–32; Jean-Pierre Caillet, "L'image du dédicant dans l'édifice cultuel (IV<sup>e</sup>–VI<sup>e</sup> s.): aux origines de la visualisation d'un pouvoir de concession divine," *Antiquité Tardive* 19 (2011): 149–170; and Christophe J. Goddard, "Euergetism, Christianity and Municipal Culture in Late Antiquity, from Aquileia to Gerasa (Fourth to Sixth Centuries CE)," 297–329 in *Benefactors and the Polis: The Public Gift in the Greek Cities from the Homeric World to Late Antiquity*, eds. Marc Domingo Gygax and Arjan Zuiderhoek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), esp. 297–298 and 321, however, have rightly observed that Greco-Roman euergetism and Christian charity were not completely incompatible because the benefactors usually shared both a common concern for the welfare of their cities and fellow citizens and a desire for personal recognition.

not mean, however, that there were not those in his own congregation who would have liked to have participated, or who, in fact, did participate in this time-honored tradition. Although in this context, he speaks of euergetism as a practice of those outside the church (ἀπὸ τῶν ἑξωθεν), he may be indirectly addressing the wealthier members of his congregation, intending to shame them even more by associating their practices with the pagans, but in a less obtrusive way.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, he may be aiming his speech at those certainly more numerous in his audience, who envied the success and fame of rich benefactors.

In other works, such as *Homilies on Genesis*, he seems to be speaking directly to the rich in his own congregation, warning them of the pitfalls of trying to achieve notoriety through this mechanism.<sup>24</sup> In *hom. in Gen.* 30.2–3, in which he is reflecting on how the builders of the tower of Babel in Gen. 11 wanted to make a name for themselves, he instructs his congregation on the surest way to achieve undying remembrance.

There are many people, even now, who in imitation of them [the people who built the tower], want to be remembered for such actions, by building splendid homes, baths, porticoes, and avenues .... I will instruct you in the way through which you may be remembered for every accomplishment and also, along with much praise, to provide yourself with much confidence in the future age .... If you distribute these possessions into the hands of the poor, letting go of stones, great buildings, fields, and baths. This is undying commemoration, this remembrance makes you a provider of countless treasures, this remembrance relieves you of the burden of sins, and secures for you great boldness before the Lord.<sup>25</sup>

John claims that people engage in these works chiefly because they desire fame and prestige and “undying commemoration.” Interestingly, however, he does not chide his listeners for this selfish lust for glory but instructs them how to win favor both from humans and from God. If they will give their money to the poor instead of foolishly spending it on expensive buildings and other civic projects, they will not only be remembered by future generations on earth but will also be able to face God confidently on the day of judgment, having been

23 Roskam, “John Chrysostom on Pagan Euergetism,” 166, speaks of this as a secondary motive of the treatise—“an indirect admonition” to “potential sinners in the Church.”

24 See *hom. in Gen.* 22.7 (PG 53, 195); 30.2–3 (PG 53, 276); and 48.4 (PG 54, 440–441). See also, *hom. in Jo.* 79.5 (PG 59, 432).

25 PG 53, 275–276.

freed from the burden of their sins through almsgiving. John's appeal to his auditors' desire for acclamation is one example of how Christian charity and Greco-Roman euergetism were not completely antithetical.

In another homily preached to his Antiochene congregation, *hom. in 1 Cor.* 10, John again employs the language of patronage and benefaction to convince the members of his church to share their wealth with those in greater need. His overall point is that every member of society relies on others for survival and that one's gifts and talents are meaningless if not shared with others. He again ends his appeal by inviting his listeners to imagine how others will speak of them on account of their generosity.

And let all say, "He delivered so-and-so from poverty, so-and-so from dangers. So-and-so would have been destroyed, had he not, after the grace of God, enjoyed your patronage (προστασίας)." .... Infinite wealth and many treasures are not as good as these words. They draw everyone's attention more than your golden garments and horses and slaves. For, these make a man appear even wearisome. They cause him to be hated as a common enemy, but the former extol him as common father and benefactor (εὐεργέτην).<sup>26</sup>

In this passage, John uses the terms προστασία and εὐεργέτης as a means to evoke the honor and prestige associated with traditional forms of Greco-Roman benefaction. His tactic is similar to the one he employs in *hom. in Gen.* 30.2–3, except in the present case, he employs the language of patronage even more overtly to appeal to the thirst for honor among his more worldly hearers.<sup>27</sup> For his more spiritually mature members, he uses a different tactic. As both a skilled rhetorician and experienced pastor, he varies his exhortation to address the various needs of those under his care.<sup>28</sup>

Euergetism competed with Christian almsgiving on more than one plane. There is, of course, the obvious danger that the wealthiest members of John's church would spend their money on hosting great spectacles for the citizens

26 *hom. in 1 Cor.* 10.4 (PG 61, 87–88).

27 See also Évelyne Patalgean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4<sup>e</sup>–7<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Mouton, 1977), 190, who discusses how late antique bishops exploited the "φιλοτιμία (love of honor)" of their hearers by transferring the language of civic benefaction into the Christian discourse on almsgiving; Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 77; and A. Natali, "Église et évergétisme à Antioche à la fin du ie siècle d'après Jean Chrysostome," 1176–1184, in *Studia Patristica* 17, part 3 (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982).

28 On this point, see Rylaarsdam, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy*, 75–85, esp. 83–85 on "Ethical Concessions."

and on other civic forms of recreation, such as the public baths. John, however, at least in his Antiochene treatises and homilies, seems to be not so much concerned with the rich of his congregation throwing away their money on civic enterprises as he is with the attitudes that underlie these forms of spending. In *oppugn.* 3.7, John is addressing parents who try to persuade their sons not to enter the monasteries. He rebukes them sharply for encouraging their children to participate in harmful civic practices by calling these practices by virtuous-sounding names. He gives full vent to his indignation: “You dress up evil in auspicious names, calling constant attendance at the chariot races and theatre ‘nobility (ἀστειότητα),’ and to be rich ‘freedom (ἐλευθερίαν),’ and to love glory ‘magnanimity (μεγαλοψυχίαν),’ and lack of reason ‘boldness (παρρησίαν),’ and prodigality ‘philanthropy (φιλανθρωπίαν),’ and injustice ‘courage (ἀνδρείαν).”<sup>29</sup> As David Hunter has noted, all of these traits were regarded as civic virtues in fourth-century Antioch,<sup>30</sup> and ἀστειότητα, μεγαλοψυχία, and φιλανθρωπία, in particular, were virtues associated with euergetism.<sup>31</sup> Recall that Libanius praises the council members for their μεγαλοφροσύνη, a synonym of μεγαλοψυχία. Even if most members of John’s congregation were not rich enough to be public benefactors, they naturally would esteem these traits and yearn to have them ascribed to themselves as much as possible. Going back to the example of the euergetēs in *educ. lib.* 4, according to John, everyone in the crowd prayed that he would attain to the same eminence. At the same time, they envied this man and were consoled when they witnessed his downfall. As a lifelong citizen of Antioch, himself, and one who as a youth had witnessed the thrill of some of these spectacles, John understood well the aspirations and longings of his flock.<sup>32</sup> Witnessing the disparities in wealth and prestige within his own congregation, he sensed the envy and rivalry among his members based on the underlying desire for power and prestige.

29 PG 47, 359.

30 David G. Hunter, trans. *John Chrysostom. A Comparison between a King and a Monk/Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 138, n. 44.

31 See also Doro Levi’s discussion of the Mosaic of Megalopsychia in idem, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, Volume 1: Text (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 323–345. In the center of the mosaic is a personification of μεγαλοψυχία, and the border contains large buildings from Daphne, a suburb of Antioch. Although the mosaic is dated to the mid-fifth century CE, it exemplifies the close association of μεγαλοψυχία with the funding of large buildings, one of the ideas John is combating in *oppugn.* 3.7, and more especially, in *hom. in Gen.* 30.2–3.

32 See *sac.* 1.2 (SC 272, 64).

In *hom. in Mt.* 40.4, John laments this attitude he observes among his fellow believers. "For indeed, there is much envy, even in the church; and more among us, than among those who govern." He goes on to question his members as to why they envy their neighbor and then anticipates their response. "Tell me, on what account do you envy your neighbor? Because you see him enjoying honor and kind words?"<sup>33</sup> He continues to provide another possible reason for this jealousy. "Because he has great authority over the rulers and governs and directs all things however he pleases." John proceeds to enumerate the dangers that those in power face, such as falling prey to pride, wrath, and insolence. Although he is not speaking specifically of euergetism here, the case could apply to a euergetēs. As he approaches the climax of his argument, John exclaims: "For nothing is so accustomed to overthrow men as the glory of the masses, making them cowardly, base, flatterers, hypocrites. Why, for example, did the Pharisees say that Christ was possessed? Was it not because they were longing for the glory of the masses?"<sup>34</sup> This "glory of the masses" is very similar to the crowd described in *educ. lib.* 4, who lavishes countless praises on the euergetēs. John does not see this thirst for glory as compatible with self-denial, and therefore, with almsgiving. He urges his hearers: "Let us not, therefore, consider this, how we may be in positions of power, and honor, and authority, but how we may dwell in virtue and philosophy."<sup>35</sup> Although he does not mention almsgiving in this context, elsewhere, as it will be recalled, John insists that true almsgiving is that which is done without pretense and is given according to one's ability.<sup>36</sup> In short, John does not want even the not-so-wealthy members of his congregation to yearn for the praises of the crowds and so be distracted from bestowing true generosity on those in need. Euergetism threatened Christian almsgiving by the potential funds that might be diverted from the poor, but the ideology behind civic benefaction and the qualities it sought to promote in its citizens was an even greater danger, one that threatened to divide the church and to destroy the very foundations and principles of Christian charity. As can be seen from the passage from *hom. in 1Cor.* 10 discussed above, however, he sometimes made concessions for his weaker members and sought to redirect their efforts at winning praise away from civic philanthropy toward care for the poor.

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33 PG 57, 443.

34 PG 57, 444.

35 PG 57, 443–444.

36 See *hom. in Mt.* 19.1 (PG 57, 273–274); 71.2–3 (PG 58, 664–666); *hom. in 1Cor.* 21.6 (PG 61, 178–179).

## 2 Competition with the Jews

The strong presence and vitality of the Jews in Antioch during the fourth century CE is well known. J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz conservatively estimates the population of the city in John's day to be 150,000.<sup>37</sup> If one assumes that the Jewish population of Antioch was slightly higher than that of Egypt, which is generally acknowledged to have been 12–13% at this time, this would mean that there were approximately 22,000 Jews residing in Antioch during the fourth century.<sup>38</sup> John's series of homilies, *Adversus Iudaeos*, generally dated to 386–387 CE, provide proof that there was not only a strong practicing Jewish community in Antioch during this time, but that a significant number from John's own congregation were drawn to join the Jews in observing Passover as well as their autumn feasts and fasts.<sup>39</sup> These sermons also indicate that other factors, such as the sanctity of the synagogue and the purported healing power of the Jews, led to a certain fascination with Judaism among Christians in Antioch. From John's remarks, it would appear that the number of Christians who were being drawn to observe Jewish rites and practices was so large as to cause scandal. John, himself, instructs the members of his church not only to refrain from saying that many fasted with the Jews, but to silence those who are spreading those claims. In the eighth and last extant sermon of the series, John urges: "Even if someone should say, 'Many fasted [with the Jews],' silence him so that the report does not become conspicuous. And say to him: 'I haven't heard anything. You have been deceived, sir, and are not telling the truth. Perhaps you know of two or three who have been drawn into error and you are just saying that it is many.'"<sup>40</sup> While it is possible that John is exaggerating the number of his flock who were participating in these Jewish rites

37 J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 40–41, 92–96.

38 Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era*, SBL Sources for Biblical Study 13 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 8.

39 See also, canons 16, 29, 37, and 38 from the Canons of Laodicea (Joannou, ed., *Discipline générale antique [Ive–IXe s.]*, vol. 1.2, 137, 142, and 146) and the *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.61, 5.17, and 6.27 (SC 320, 330; SC 329, 266 and 268; SC 329, 378 and 380) which contain various prohibitions against association with the Jews, such as observing the Sabbath, celebrating Jewish festivals, entering the synagogue, and eating unleavened bread during the Passover as well as counsel against listening to the Jews concerning abstinence from religious activities during menstruation and nocturnal emissions.

40 *Jud.* 8.4 (PG 48, 933). Discourses 2 and 4–8 of this series are thought to have been delivered at Antioch in 387 while Discourse 1 is thought to have been delivered in 386. Discourse 3 is no longer regarded as originally belonging to this series. See Wendy Pradels, Rudolf Brän-

and gatherings, if it were not a problem at all, he likely would not have gone to the trouble to preach an entire series of sermons against Judaizing Christians.

In *Jud* 1.7, John accuses the Jews of several vices relating to money, including exploitation of the poor. "What else do you wish me to tell you? Of their plundering, their greediness, their betrayal of the poor, their thefts, their trickery in trade? The whole day will not suffice for us to explicate this."<sup>41</sup> Paul Harkins contends these are standard charges that John levies against the Jews and an example of his inflated rhetoric.<sup>42</sup> As will be discussed in the following section, Nicene and non-Nicene bishops sought to discredit one another in how each cared for the poor, and it is possible John is employing a similar tactic to discredit the Jews in this homily. In other homilies, however, he compares Jewish customs of giving with the giving habits of his own audience to shame his parishioners into contributing more. In *hom. in I Cor.* 43.4, he seems to indicate that the Jews he is familiar with still tithe. As he is encouraging his audience to lay aside a tenth of their pay and collect the money in a box beside their bed, he claims he is not asking anything exceptional of them. "For I do not ask anything great, but only as much as the childish ones among the Jews ... just so much, let us throw in, we who look forward to heaven."<sup>43</sup> John again brings in the example of the Jews in *hom. in Mt.* 64.4, although this time, he is referring to the giving habits of those during Jesus' time. He chastises his congregation for not even giving a tenth of their possessions while the Pharisees gave from one-third to one-half of their goods, if one totaled up their separate tithes. Referencing Matt. 5:20, his point is that the righteousness of his auditors must "be greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees," and he clearly interprets "righteousness" in this context as almsgiving.<sup>44</sup> Although this does not appear to be a veiled reference to the Jews of his own day, he clearly mentions this Jewish tradition of tithing to shame his audience into giving more than they are currently giving.

Although there are no surviving Jewish texts from Antioch during the fourth century, several Greco-Roman texts mention the synagogue as being a center of

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dle, and Martin Heimgartner, "The Sequence and Dating of the Series of John Chrysostom's Eight Discourses *Adversus Judaeos*," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 6 (2002): 90–116 (91–92).

41 PG 48, 853.

42 Paul W. Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom: Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, trans. Paul W. Harkins (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1979), 25, note 83.

43 PG 61, 373–374.

44 *hom. in Mt.* 64.4 (PG 58, 615).



care for the poor.<sup>45</sup> The Emperor Julian's remark, "Not one of the Jews begs," can also be taken as evidence that the Jews, at least, cared for their own indigent.<sup>46</sup> The Jews were also expected to give to any beggar, regardless of his nationality.<sup>47</sup> In some Palestinian amoraic texts (written by rabbis living from approximately 200–500 CE), in cities where there was a mixed population of Jews and gentiles, the charity collectors (*parnasim*) were instructed to provide for the poor gentiles as well as for the poor Jews.<sup>48</sup> In one text, however, gentiles were only allowed to receive support if other gentiles in the community gave money to the collectors.<sup>49</sup> In the Jerusalem Talmud, a Palestinian amoraic text, detailed instructions are given regarding the operation of a communal soup kitchen (*tamhui*) and local charity fund (*quppah*).<sup>50</sup> Other sources mention a hostel for visitors or suggest that the synagogue served as such a hostel, but it is not clear if such places welcomed non-Jews.<sup>51</sup>

45 See Johanan Hans Levy, *Studies in Jewish Hellenism* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1960), 197–203.

46 Julian the apostate, *Ep.* 49, 430 D in J. Bidez, ed., *L'Empereur Julien Œuvres Complètes* 1.2 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960), 145. Interestingly, Julian's remark about not one of the Jews begging is immediately followed by a statement regarding the Christians even taking care of the pagan poor. "The impious Galileans [how Julian typically referred to the Christians] feed their own and ours as well." See Aryay Finkelstein, "Julian among Jews, Christians, and 'Hellenes' in Antioch: Jewish Practice as a Guide to 'Hellenes' and a Goad to Christians," (unpublished PhD dissertation, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2011), 128–149, who explains that Julian probably knew of Jewish care for the poor from the Hebrew Bible, his own observations on charitable giving at the synagogues, and through inscriptions on buildings praising the Jewish donors who had funded them.

47 See *Mek. de-Rabbi Ismael*, *Yitro*, tractate *Amaleq, parashah* 2; *Lev. R.* 34.2, 9; and *y. Shab.* 6.10, 8d, all quoted in Yael Wilfand, *Poverty, Charity, and the Image of the Poor in Rabbinic Texts from the Land of Israel* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 177–179. By contrast, some earlier rabbis or Tannaim (rabbis active from approximately 70–220 CE), appear to have taught that one was not obligated to give to a person who came begging to his/her door. See Wilfand, *Poverty*, 176–177 and Gardner, *The Origins of Organized Charity*, 7. Gardner explains that early rabbis discouraged giving directly to beggars because they wanted people to give indirectly through the *tamhui* and *quppa*.

48 See *t. Git.* 3.13–14; and *y. Git.* 5.8, 47c.

49 See *y. 'Abod. Zar.* 1.3, 39c. See also Yael Wilfand, *Poverty*, 198–217, esp. 199–207.

50 See *y. Pe'ah* 8.7, 21a. While much of the evidence for the existence of these two institutions comes from Israel, there is archaeological evidence that a *tamhui* from the third century CE existed in Aphrodisias (now modern-day western Turkey). See Joyce Reynolds and Robert Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisias: Greek Inscription with Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987), 27, 79–80.

51 See *b. Pesahim* 100b–101a; and *y. Megillah* 3:4, 74a. See also Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 406.

While not much is known about these giving practices and institutions outside of the land of Israel, there is plenty of evidence that Palestinian rabbis frequently visited Antioch and communicated with certain leaders there during the fourth century.<sup>52</sup> This evidence suggests that the Jews of Antioch would have been familiar with Jewish practices in Palestine during the fourth century, including charitable institutions, and that the Jews of these cities enjoyed amicable relations with each other. As Palestine was one of the known centers for Jewish study and authority at this time, it only makes sense that the Jews of Antioch would have sought to imitate the practices of their Palestinian cohorts if at all, possible.<sup>53</sup> If charitable institutions such as the *tamhui*, *quppa*, and hostels for strangers did exist in Antioch simultaneously with John's tenure as priest, he would likely have done all in his power to rival such displays of philanthropic activity by the Christians under his charge.

### 3 Competition with Other Clerics

In the conclusion to his book, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, Richard Finn remarks on the competition between bishops of various Christian groups with regard to almsgiving. He maintains: "Nothing has demonstrated that Nicene and Arian Christians differed in their approach to almsgiving. But each side saw and presented their own episcopal charity as a marker of orthodoxy and sought to blacken the reputation of their opponents by accusing them of

52 For instance, the great orator Libanius corresponded with a certain Palestinian Patriarch on behalf of the Jews in Antioch during this time. See Libanius, *Ep.* 914, 917, 973, 974, 1084, 1097, 1098, and 1105 in Richard Foerster, ed. Libanius, *Opera*, vol. 11 (Leipzig: Lipsiae, 1922, repr. Hildesheim, 1963), 61–62; 63; 107–108; 108–109; 200–201; 207–208; 212. (English translation available in Meeks and Wilken, 60–63). In *Genesis Rabbah*, some of Rabbi Tanhuma bar Abba's arguments with gentiles over Jewish beliefs are set in Antioch (*Gen. Rab.* 19.4). It is evident from *y. Sanh.* 3:2, 14a that the Palestinian rabbis knew of a Beth Din in Antioch, and from *y. Kidd.* 3:3, 35a that Rabbai Simlai from the third century CE was associated with the city. Finally, *Sifre Num.* 84 informs us that the ecumenical Patriarch occasionally traveled to Antioch to meet with the Roman legate, who frequently resided in the city, and it can be assumed that while he was there, he also would have met and worshiped with the local Jewish community. See also Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch* 12–13.

53 See Finkelstein, "Julian among Jews, Christians, and 'Hellenes' in Antioch," 142, who although he is doubtful as to whether *tamhuis* and *quppas* existed outside the land of Israel concedes: "Cities like Antioch, with strong Jewish communities, and with close ties to Palestine, may have supported its own charitable institutions."

fraud or violence towards the poor.”<sup>54</sup> He then brings in the example of Eusebius of Vercelli, describing in a letter to his Nicene supporters in Italy how the “Arians” had thwarted his efforts to care for the poor upon his return from exile. Eusebius accused the “Arians” of destroying everything the Nicene Christians had stored up both for their own sustenance and that of the needy.<sup>55</sup> Earlier in his book, Finn also points out that “Catholic” and “Arian” bishops accused each other of misappropriating church funds allocated to the poor. He recalls both that Athanasius was accused of misusing imperial alms for the poor and that Athanasius accused George of Cappadocia and the group of “Arians” associated with him of seizing the bread and houses of widows and orphans in Alexandria.<sup>56</sup>

Although there is no record of John explicitly criticizing bishops from other Christian groups of neglecting the poor or mismanaging church funds set aside for the poor, there is ample evidence that he competed with these groups in other ways, such as countering the processions of the non-Nicenes through the streets of Constantinople with marches of his own. There is also evidence to support the claim that either Anomoean or Homoiousion groups had established hostels to care for the poor, sick, or strangers in both Antioch and Constantinople during John’s lifetime.<sup>57</sup> It is likely that John competed with the leaders of these different sects either for control of the existing charitable institutions or in establishing new ones.

In John’s days as priest of Antioch and bishop of Constantinople, there were many Christian groups in both cities. In Antioch, from 362–415, there were two groups of Christians who opposed Arianism, but who were not in union with one another. These were the Meletians and Eustathians, named after their leaders, Meletius and Eustathius, respectively.<sup>58</sup> From 361–376, Euzoius,

54 Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 261.

55 Ibid. See also Eusebius of Vercelli, *ep.* 2.6.2–3 (CCSL 9, 107).

56 Ibid, 131. See also Athanasius, *apol. sec.* 18.2 in H.G. Opitz, ed. *Athanasius Werke*, ii/1 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 100; and *fug.* 6 (SC 56, 139).

57 For Anomoean establishments in Antioch, see Timothy S. Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital in the Byzantine Empire*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 77, note 62. For Homoiousion establishments in Constantinople, see Sozomen, *h. e.* 4.27 (GCS, n.s. 4, 184); and Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital*, 76–88.

58 Rome and Alexandria supported Paulinus, the bishop appointed by the Eustathians, probably because he subscribed to the belief that the Father and Son were of the same substance (*homoousios*), but the Western emperor Gratian, the Eastern emperor Theodosius I, and Basil of Caesarea supported Meletius, who, although he had Homoian leanings earlier in his career, eventually upheld the *homoousios* of Nicaea. The Council of Nicaea in 325 CE had declared that the Father and Son were of the same substance (*homoousion*), but some, such as Meletius wanted to avoid *ousia* language and would only say that the Father

an “Anomoean,” who argued that the Father and Son were of a dissimilar substance (*anomoian*) and who had the backing of Emperor Valens, also claimed to be the bishop of Antioch.<sup>59</sup> Finally, there was from about 376–388, a bishop of the Apollinarians in Antioch, Vitalis, who had originally been a follower of Meletius, but who was later ordained by Apollinaris of Laodicea.<sup>60</sup> All of these Christian groups were in competition with each other—not just for imperial favor, but for the loyalty of the people. One of the ways they strove to win popular support was through their care of the poor and the founding of charitable institutions, such as ξενοδοχεία, πτωχοτροφεία, and νοσοκομεία (hostels for strangers, the poor, and the sick, respectively).<sup>61</sup> The Anomoeans likely already had a large philanthropic presence in Antioch because Leontius, bishop of Antioch from 344–358, who was an active member of this group, was known for the establishment of ξενοδοχεία.<sup>62</sup> Also, Aetius, whom Leontius ordained as deacon was said to have practiced medicine free of charge in the name of the Antiochene church.<sup>63</sup> Although by the time John was ordained a priest in Antioch in 386 there was no longer an Anomoean bishop and the Apollinarians had been weakened by the decrees of the Council of Constantinople in 381, the Eustathians and Meletians had separate bishops until 415, and thus, likely would have remained strong competitors with one another. Also, even though the Anomoeans no longer had a bishop when John was ordained a priest in 386, their strong presence in the city is attested by the fact that John preached a series of sermons against them in late 386–early 387.<sup>64</sup> Although some of the

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and Son were “like” or “similar” (*homoios*). See Lewis Ayers, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 138–139, 176. John was ordained a deacon by Meletius and a priest by Meletius’ successor, Flavian.

59 Euzoius was an “Anomoean,” who argued that the Father and Son were of a dissimilar substance (*anomoian*) and had the backing of Emperor Valens. See Socrates, *h.e.* 2.44 and 4.35 (GCS n.s. 1, 182 and 270); and Sozomen, *h.e.* 6.5 and 6.37 (GCS n.s. 4, 242 and 297).

60 Ekkehard Mühlenberg, *Apollinaris von Laodicea* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1969), 59.

61 These terms were somewhat fluid. For example, a ξενοδοχείον sometimes seems to refer to a shelter for the poor rather than one for strangers. See Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 82–88.

62 See Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital*, 77, note 62.

63 *Histoire de Barhadbešabba*, 14, edited by François Nau (PO 23:279). See also Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 1.42, edited by Werner Jaeger in GNO 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 36, who accused Aetius of only pretending to practice medicine while he covertly tried to convince the “outcasts” or “good for nothings” of his theological opinions.

64 There are twelve homilies in the series, but the last two are dated to 398, soon after John became bishop of Constantinople. They are also listed under three separate titles, *De Incomprehensibili dei natura* (hom. 1–5); *De beato Philogonio* (hom. 6); and *De Inconsu-*

Anomoeans were present in his congregation as he addresses them directly in the eighth homily, they may have continued to meet as a separate group as well.<sup>65</sup>

A similar situation existed in Constantinople, beginning with the death of the bishop Alexander in 337, except the capital city housed even more Christian sects than Antioch. There was the party of Paul, who adopted the *homoousios* formula of the Council of Nicaea and was supported by the West; the party of Macedonius, who favored the term *homoiousios* and whose followers later became known for their denial of the Holy Spirit's divinity; the party of Eusebius of Nicomedia, who had been appointed by Constantius and used the vague designation *homoian* (similar) to describe the relationship of the Father and the Son; and the Anomoeans, who, by the 350s, had gained strength and spread from Antioch to Constantinople. Finally, there were groups of Novatians and Apollinarians in the imperial city. Marathonius, a disciple of Eustathius of Sebaste who was later ordained a deacon in Constantinople by Macedonius, was known for his establishment of monastic communities, called *synoikiai*, and hostels for the sick and the poor.<sup>66</sup> His monastic communities likely managed these hostels up until the defeat of the Homoiousians at the Council of Constantinople in 381 or until the death of Emperor Valens in 378.<sup>67</sup>

When John became bishop of Constantinople in 398, the Homoiousians and Anomoeans had lost their churches inside the city, but they were still permitted to assemble outside the city walls. Sozomen relates that the "Arians" (a reference to the Anomoeans or to both the Anomoeans and Homoiousians) would sing songs that promoted their anti-Trinitarian dogma while they processed to their places of worship on Sundays, Saturdays, and all festival days. John reportedly countered this practice by instigating processions of his own that were supported by the emperor.<sup>68</sup> Other Christian sects, therefore, were still present

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*stantiali* (hom. 7–12). See Paul W. Harkins, "Introduction," in *St. John Chrysostom: On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, trans. Paul W. Harkins, Fathers of the Church 72 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 22–35.

65 See *Pet. mat. fil. Zeb.* (sc 396, 168)/*c. anom.* 8.1 (pg 48, 769). In 381, Theodosius had issued an edict, depriving heretical groups of their church buildings, but these groups were not prohibited from gathering in other locations. See *Cod. Thds.* 16.5.6 (sc 497, 234–236).

66 See Sozomen, *h. e.* 4.27 (GCS, n.s. 4, 184).

67 Timothy S. Miller and Susanna Elm have both argued that many charitable institutions in the latter half of the fourth century were founded by either Arians or Homoiousians and that such charitable activity was a distinctive feature of these groups. See Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital*, 76–88; and Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 212.

68 Sozomen, *h. e.* 8.8 (GCS, n.s. 4, 360–361).

in Constantinople during John's time as patriarch, and he likely competed with them on various levels, including the solicitation of alms among the wealthy.

In addition to facing competition from the Anomoeans and Homoiousians in Constantinople, John also faced competition from visiting priests and bishops within the Nicene party who opposed him on other grounds. Palladius and the *Vita* of Olympias record that Olympias, a wealthy widow and deaconess who supported John and his ministry in Constantinople, also provided for the needs of some of John's enemies, such as Antiochus of Ptolemais, Acacius of Berea, and Severian of Gabala.<sup>69</sup> Palladius also states that Theophilus of Alexandria, the main one responsible for John's deposition at the Synod of the Oak, "kissed [Olympias'] knees (τὰ γόνατα ταύτης ἐφίλησεν)," in an effort to get money from her, but failing to secure anything from her except food and hospitality, he began to revile her.<sup>70</sup> This shows how clerics not even from Constantinople could solicit the patronage of wealthy people in John's congregations and thus, hamper his own fundraising efforts.

Among his Christian contemporaries, therefore, John would have been in competition with the Eustathians in Antioch and the Homoiousians in Constantinople in establishing various hostels. He was also competing with these different groups for converts and general popular support, which having a reputation as προστάτης of the poor would attract. Additionally, in Constantinople, he faced competition from bishops of other cities who visited the imperial city from time to time and solicited funds from the wealthy members of his congregation. In addition to contending with all these warring factions, John had to deal with monastic groups in both Antioch and Constantinople who threatened to derail his philanthropic projects and challenge his reputation as patron of the poor.

#### 4 Competition with Monastic Groups for Alms and Patronage of the Poor

Andrea Sterk and Claudia Rapp have called attention to the competition between monks and bishops for spiritual authority in late antiquity, and Richard Finn and Daniel Caner have specifically noted how bishops and monks competed with one another in their care for the poor.<sup>71</sup> Finn asserts that "alms-

69 See Palladius, *v. Chrys.* 17 (SC 341, 348); and *v. Olymp.* 14 (SC 13 bis, 438). It is likely that she housed and fed these men during their stay in Constantinople.

70 *v. Chrys.* 16 (SC 341, 322 and 330).

71 See Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church: The Monk-Bishop in Late*

giving was so closely associated with episcopal authority by the turn of the fourth century that some forms or practices could become in other hands a means to rival or criticize individual bishops.” He then notes two examples in hagiographical literature of monks organizing the distribution of food in time of famine or establishing a *ξενοδοχεῖον* and explains that these activities occurred in the context of competition with the local bishop. Interestingly, these examples are from Antioch and Chalcedon, the latter of which was only a few kilometers from Constantinople across the Sea of Marmara. According to his *Vita*, Alexander the Sleepless is said to have established a *ξενοδοχεῖον* in Antioch through the support of the city’s wealthy Christians, which incited the envy of the clergy. Theodotus, bishop of Antioch, finally succeeded in expelling Alexander and his monks, but it required the intervention of the *magister militum*.<sup>72</sup> Finn also argues that Callinicus, author of the *Vita Hypatii*, portrays Hypatius competing with his bishop Eulalius for support among the poor. Callinicus records that Hypatius, who had reestablished the monastery of Rufinus a few miles outside of Chalcedon, was able to defend it against the threats of Eulalius with the support of peasants, whom he had fed during an earlier famine.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to competing with bishops as patrons of the poor, some monks who did not work and were completely reliant upon the contributions of others could thwart a bishop’s fundraising efforts by diverting to themselves private donations that would have otherwise gone to the church.<sup>74</sup> As mentioned in chapter five, John praised the monks outside Antioch for performing manual labor not only to provide for their own needs, but also to assist the needy.<sup>75</sup> In addition to providing the poor with food and possibly alms from their sur-

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*Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 13–34; Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 64–65 and 103–104; Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 98, 210–212, and 262–263; and Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 169–177 and 190–199. Caner specifically discusses John’s competition with the monk Isaac for the laity’s alms. See especially, 195–197.

72 *v. Alex. Acoem.* 38–41 (PO 6, 688–690). It is uncertain if these events are historically accurate as Theodotus is thought to have been the bishop of Antioch from 424–428, but according to *v. Hyp.* and *v. Alex. Acoem.*, Alexander would have arrived in Antioch c. 404. See Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 211–212 and notes 203–205.

73 See Callinicus, *v. Hyp.* 31.5 and 41.11 (SC 177, 206 and 244); and Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 210–211.

74 See Mayer, “Poverty and generosity,” 149–154, who argues that individuals preferred to give money to the ascetics or “voluntary poor” and continued to be suspicious of and even disdain the economic poor. See also idem, “Poverty and society,” 479–480.

75 See *hom. in Mt.* 72.4 (PG 58, 672); and *hom. in Mt.* 68.3 (PG 58, 644).

plus garden produce, John states that the monks also assisted those with diseases and physical disabilities, such as lepers, the blind, and the lame.<sup>76</sup> Hagiographic works and monastic rules from the fourth–fifth centuries also suggest that monks either provided for the poor through their own manual labor or redistributed surplus food and alms to the needy from the contributions they received from others. Basil urges his monks in his Longer Rule to perform their work with the goal of being able to provide something for the needy, and Callinicus in the *Life of Hypatius* describes a *scholastikos* as giving money and clothes to Hypatius, the former of which was directed to the monasteries and the latter of which was redistributed among the needy.<sup>77</sup>

There were, however, other monks during the third and fourth centuries who not only did not give alms but thought it justifiable to beg for alms. As has been discussed by Daniel Caner and Peter Brown, the issue of whether monks should be self-sufficient or were entitled to receive support from lay Christians was a hotly contested issue, especially in Syria. Some of these groups were considered orthodox, but some were deemed “heretical.”<sup>78</sup> In his *Panarion*, written in the mid-370s CE, Epiphanius of Salamis catalogs the heresies from the flood up to his own time and describes this group of monks as the most recent threat to orthodoxy. He characterizes the “Messalians” as having no profession, being idle, begging for food and alms, and cohabiting with the opposite sex.<sup>79</sup> According to Epiphanius, these monks justified their reception of alms from Jesus’ admonition in John 6:27 not to work for food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life. Epiphanius dismisses this argument, countering it with Paul’s instructions in 1 Thess. 4:11 to provide for oneself through the work of one’s hands.<sup>80</sup> It is debated whether the Messalians were an actual ascetic movement or simply a derogatory term used to refer to any monastic group deemed heretical or troublesome. For example, Jean Gribomont has pointed out that the practices ascribed to the Messalians are remarkably simi-

76 See *hom. in Mt.* 72.4 (PG 58, 671).

77 Cited in Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 92. See also Basil, *reg. fus.* 42 (PG 31, 1025A); and Callinicus, *v. Hyp.* 35.1–6 (SC 177, 220).

78 Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, devotes his fourth chapter (pp. 51–70) to the Syrian debate over whether monks should engage in manual labor. He points out on p. 58 that the *Liber Graduum* (*Book of Steps*) is a fourth-century work thought to have been written by an orthodox community who argued monks should receive financial support from the faithful laity, the “Upright” or “Righteous Ones.” Caner, in *Wandering, Begging Monks*, discusses this debate in the East on pp. 104–117.

79 Epiphanius, *haer.* 80.3.4–5.6 in *Epiphanius III.* (GCS 37, 487–490).

80 *haer.* 80.4.1–6 in *Epiphanius III* (GCS 37, 488–489).



lar to those ascribed to Eustathius of Sebaste and his followers in Asia Minor.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, in ancient sources, one of the Messalians' most commonly cited characteristics is the rejection of manual labor.<sup>82</sup>

As Epiphanius claims that this group was present in Antioch while he was writing his *Panarion* and Theodoret relates that Flavian expelled the Messalians from Syria after a meeting with Adelphius, one of the group's leaders, John may be referring to this same group in his *hom. in Jo.* 44.1.<sup>83</sup> Here, he reacts against those who use John 6:27 as an excuse for idleness. "For to say, 'Labor not for the meat that perishes,' is not the expression of one implying that we ought to be idle ... but that we ought to work and to impart. This is the meat that never perishes."<sup>84</sup> Then, alluding to Matt. 25:31–46, which identifies Christ with the poor, he goes on to explain that it would be ridiculous to say that one who provides food, drink, and clothing to Christ works for meat that perishes.

By contrast, in his eighth catechetical homily, thought to have been delivered in Antioch in 390, John praises the Syriac-speaking monk-priests who are present in the audience that day for providing for their own needs through the work of their hands. "For they fulfill in deeds the law of the apostle, who urges us to procure our daily food through the work of our hands. For they heard the blessed Paul when he said: 'We toil, working with our own hands (1 Cor. 4:12).' And again, "These hands have supplied my own needs and those with me (Acts 20:34).'"<sup>85</sup> From these remarks, it seems that John believes that monks should at least be self-sufficient, and ideally, earn enough to contribute to the less fortunate.

81 Jean Gribomont, "Le dossier des origines du Messalianisme," in *Epektasis: mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, ed. Jacques Fontaine and Charles Kannengiesser (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 611–625 (614).

82 Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 103 and note 88.

83 See Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 176, note 88, for differing views on whether John is referring to the Messalians in this context. For the existence of the Messalians in Antioch, see *ibid.*, 87–88, 157, note 130; and Epiphanius, *haer.* 80.3.7 in *Epiphanius III* (GCS 37, 488). The synod in which Theodoret, *h. e.* 4.11 (GCS, n.s. 5, 231), claims Flavian expelled the Messalians may have been held before John was ordained a priest in 386, during his priesthood until 397, or after he had already been made bishop of Constantinople in the Fall of 397. It seems doubtful, however, that the group was completely expelled from Syria as Jerome relates in *Pelag.* Prol. 1 (PL 23, 496) that the Messalian heresy was in almost all of Syria. See also Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*, Vol 2, CSCO 197, Subsidia 17 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus, 1960), 129–130.

84 PG 59, 248.

85 *catech.* 8.2–3 (SC 50, 248–249).

While it is not certain that John is denouncing monks specifically in *hom. in Jo.* 44.1, in *hom. in 1Thess.* 6.1, part of a series traditionally assigned to Constantinople, the reference to ascetics is clear.<sup>86</sup> He is commenting on 1Thess. 4:11, the same verse that Epiphanius employs against the Messalians.<sup>87</sup>

“And to work,” he says, “with your hands.” Where now are those who seek spiritual work? See how he destroys every excuse by them, saying, “with your hands?” But does one perform fasts with his hands? Or all-night vigils? Or sleeping on the ground? No one may say this. But he speaks concerning spiritual work. For it is truly spiritual, working to offer to others, and nothing is equal to this. “So that you may walk,” he says, “becomingly.” See how he handles them? He did not say that you may not disgrace yourself by begging, but he has hinted at this. Yet, he puts it more gently, so as both to strike and not to burden them excessively.<sup>88</sup>

Daniel Caner argues that in this passage, John is referring to the practices of Isaac and his urban monks in Constantinople.<sup>89</sup> These remarks, however, do not fit well with what we know about Isaac and his cohorts. According to Sozomen and Palladius, Isaac was one of John’s chief enemies, and at John’s condemnation at the Synod of the Oak, Isaac brought his own list of seventeen charges against him.<sup>90</sup> Isaac and his followers, however, were not known for fasting, lying on the ground, or for carrying out all-night vigils. By contrast, Alexander the Sleepless, who was charged with Messalianism and condemned and banished from Constantinople in the 420s, was famous for his all-night vigils spent in perpetual psalm-singing.<sup>91</sup> Although John had been dead for roughly fifteen–twenty years by the time Alexander reached Constantinople, it is possible that another group of monks, similar to Alexander’s, was present in the capital during John’s tenure there. In the homily quoted above, John goes on to say that not only are some of the Christians scandalized by this behavior, but non-Christians are even referring to Christians as “Christ-mongers” on account

86 For the provenance of this homily, see von Bonsdorff, *Zur Predigtätigkeit des Johannes Chrysostomus*, 101; and Mayer, *Provenance*, 195–196, who argues that there is not enough internal evidence to assign the homily either to Constantinople or Antioch.

87 Epiphanius, *haer.* 80.4.2 in *Epiphanius III* (GCS 37, 488).

88 PG 62, 429–430.

89 Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 171–172.

90 See Sozomen, *h.e.* 8.9 (GCS, n.s. 4, 362); and Palladius, *v. Chrys.* 6 (SC 341, 126–128). For the list of charges Isaac brought against John, see Photius, *cod.* 59 (SC 342, 108–112).

91 See *v. Alex. Acoem.* 26–27 (PO 6, 677–678).

of these begging ascetics. As it appears that Isaac was greatly revered among the people of Constantinople, and particularly, the nobility, it is not likely that his monks would have caused such scandal, even if they did beg. Alexander and his sleepless monks, however, did cause quite a stir due to their large numbers and potential strain on the economy; therefore, it is likely that a group similar to his was the target of John's attack.<sup>92</sup> It is also possible that John could have been referring to a group of monks in Antioch as this homily is not of certain Constantinopolitan provenance.<sup>93</sup>

John likely competed with Isaac and his monks, too, however. In Constantinople, after the death of Emperor Valens (a supporter of Macedonius and the *homoiousios*) in 378, Isaac likely took over the responsibility of running the various philanthropic institutions established by Marathionius.<sup>94</sup> He had come to Constantinople during the 370s to fight against Arianism. When the Nicenes gained the upper hand at the Council of Constantinople in 381 and the Macedonians' views were condemned, it is likely that the Nicene monks in the city, now under Isaac's leadership, assumed control of the various hostels for the sick and poor.<sup>95</sup> According to Isaac's *Vita*, composed in the sixth or seventh century, Isaac is said to have gathered support for the poor whom he met on the way to visit various aristocrats' homes.<sup>96</sup> Callinicus' *Vita Hypatii* confirms, at least, that Isaac had won support among the monks of Constantinople for his provision for them, likely through other wealthy Christians whom he solicited on their behalf.<sup>97</sup>

According to Palladius, when John came to Constantinople, he reallocated some of the bishop's funds to a hostel for the sick (νοσοκομείον) and established additional hostels for the sick, appointing two of his priests to oversee their operation as well as supplying "doctors, cooks, and kind workers among the

92 By the time Alexander had reached Constantinople, his band had increased to about three-hundred monks. See *v. Alex* 43 (PO 6, 692); and Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 147 and note 95.

93 See Wendy Mayer, "Monasticism at Antioch and Constantinople in the Late Fourth Century: A Case of Exclusivity or Diversity," 275–288 in Pauline Allen, Raymond Canning, and Lawrence Cross with B. Janelle Caiger, eds. *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, Vol. 1 (Everton Park, Queensland, Australia: Centre for Early Christian Studies, 1998), 278–279, who argues that there were likely "heterodox" monks living around Antioch during the period of John's priesthood.

94 For a summary of the history of the charitable institutions at Constantinople, see Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital*, 76–85 and 118–125.

95 See Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 194.

96 *v. Isaacii* 4.16 (*AASS Maii* VII.252).

97 Callinicus, *v. Hyp.* 11.4 (SC 177, 111).

celibate ones (ἀγάμων).<sup>98</sup> These “celibate ones” may have been those whom, according to Sozomen, John approved because they “kept quiet in the monasteries and practiced philosophy there” as contrasted with those like Isaac, who “went out of doors and appeared down in the city.”<sup>99</sup> Gilbert Dagron has suggested that rather than establishing additional νοσοκομεία and other hostels, John assumed control over the existing hostels as a way to curtail Isaac’s influence.<sup>100</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, even the monks in Antioch who dwelt “in the wilderness” and whom John continually praised likely also served in one of the city’s hostels for the poor or sick.<sup>101</sup> John did not oppose the monks leaving the monasteries for this sort of work, but he was against the monks socializing in people’s homes and involving themselves in political affairs.<sup>102</sup> Of course, the main reason John opposed some of these monks was because they did not submit themselves to his authority. Until the Council of Chalcedon in 451, monks were not officially under the control of a bishop; therefore, John could not impose any disciplinary measures upon them, unless they were also priests, like Isaac.<sup>103</sup> Even with Isaac being a priest, however, John’s power over him was limited as Isaac had the respect of the monks and other laypeople of Constantinople and supported Nicene orthodoxy. It is thus likely that he sought to diminish Isaac’s power in other ways, such as taking control of the hostels for the sick and various other charitable establishments, causes for which he would seek support from members of various congregations in the city where he alternately preached.<sup>104</sup>

98 Palladius, *v. Chrys.* 5 (SC 341, 122).

99 Sozomen, *h. e.* 8.9 (GCS, n.s. 4, 362).

100 Gilbert Dagron, “Les moines et la ville: Le monachisme à Constantinople jusqu’au concile de Chalcédoine (451),” *Travaux et Mémoires* 4 (1970): 229–276 (264). See also Rita Lizzi, “Ascetismo e predicazione urbana nell’Egitto del v secolo,” *Atti dell’Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* 141 (1982/83): 127–145 (137–138), who likewise suggests that John reformed the administration of the hostels as a way to place them under his oversight rather than monastic supervision. See, however, J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, “Friends and Enemies of John Chrysostom,” 85–111 in *Maistor: Classical, Byzantine, and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, ed. Ann Moffat, Byzantina Australiensia 5 (Canberra, Australia: Australian National University, 1984), 92, who is skeptical of this opinion.

101 See *hom. in Mt.* 72.4 (PG 58, 671).

102 See Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 123–125.

103 See canons 4, 8, and 23 of the Council of Chalcedon in Tanner, *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, 89, 91, 97–98.

104 For John’s competition with Isaac in the way of almsgiving, see Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 190–199, especially 196. For the various congregations in which John ordinarily preached, see Wendy Mayer, “John Chrysostom: Ordinary Preacher, Extraordinary Audi-

It is also possible that Isaac's monks may have threatened to divert potential funds away from the church to supply their own needs. Even though Callinicus presents Isaac as soliciting alms for the monks through his network of wealthy patrons, he may also indicate that some of Isaac's monks begged. He reports that Isaac instructed Hypatius to open his door to "every stranger (παντὶ ξένῳ)" who came by the latter's monastery in Chalcedon.<sup>105</sup> Caner has argued that the context suggests that Isaac means his monks rather than random strangers.<sup>106</sup> While Callinicus is discussing Isaac's care for the monasteries surrounding Constantinople in this passage, it is not certain he is referring to monks or, in any case, to Isaac's monks. Still, Caner may be right in asserting that Isaac's monks did beg. If this is the case, John may have regarded Isaac's monks in a similar way to how he thought of other monks who did not work—as stealing for themselves what rightfully belonged to the involuntarily needy, and thus, diminishing his own reputation as patron of the poor.

It is important to realize that John himself was supported by Olympias. Olympias' *Vita* states that Olympias placed at John's disposal ten thousand pounds of gold; twenty thousand pounds of silver; all her real estate in the provinces of Thrace, Galatia, Cappadocia Prima, and Bithynia; several houses in Constantinople; and all her suburban estates.<sup>107</sup> According to this same source, she later gave John her remaining properties and her portion of the citizens' bread supply.<sup>108</sup> These gifts, of course, would have gone to support John's various projects, but Olympias also provided for John's daily needs, continuing to cover all his and his companions' expenses even when he was in exile.<sup>109</sup> John believed he had a right to support based on 1 Tim. 5:17–18, which states that presbyters who preach and teach deserve to be paid, and Palladius justified this support by explaining that John wanted to imitate the apostle Paul in not making use of his rights as an apostle (i.e. receiving material aid from the church).<sup>110</sup> As Caner and others have pointed out, however, John's acceptance of this aid surely aroused the fury of certain monks who would have seen this as

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ence," 105–137 in *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics*, eds. Mary B. Cunningham and Pauline Allen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 127. Although he likely preached most often in the Great Church, he also preached in the churches of St. Anastasia, St. Eirene, St. Paul, and the Church of the Holy Apostles.

105 Callinicus, *v. Hyp.* 11.3 (SC 177, 110).

106 Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 198, note 204.

107 *v. Olymp.* 5 (SC 13 bis, 416, 418).

108 *Ibid.* 7 (SC 13 bis, 420).

109 Palladius, *v. Chrys.* 17 (SC 341, 348); *v. Olymp.* 8 (SC 13 bis, 422).

110 Chrysostom, *hom. in 2 Thess.* 3 (PG 62, 494); and *v. Chrys.* 17 (SC 341, 348 and 350). See 1 Cor. 9 for Paul's comments on his rights as an apostle.

a double standard.<sup>111</sup> As was mentioned above, however, Olympias gave money to other clergy and ascetics, and according to Sozomen, John chided her for this indiscriminate giving, specifically disapproving of her “bestowing wealth on the wealthy.”<sup>112</sup> Even Palladius, who portrays her as refusing Theophilus’ requests, claims that in addition to John, she gave money and lands to Nectarius, Amphilochius, Optimus, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil’s brother Peter, and Epiphanius of Cyprus.<sup>113</sup> As Epiphanius became an ally of Theophilus, this shows why John, at times, might have attempted to curtail Olympias’ generosity.<sup>114</sup> Olympias, however, also supported certain monks whom John deemed worthy of assistance such as the fifty monks Theophilus of Alexandria expelled as heretics.<sup>115</sup> All this suggests that John himself was a recipient of alms and that he, at times, solicited alms not only on behalf of the involuntarily poor, but also on behalf of the voluntarily poor. Although, as a general principle, John thought monks should provide for their own needs, even he realized there might be situations, such as exile, when this was not possible. In such cases, provided they were orthodox and virtuous, he believed they were worthy of support.

## 5 Conclusion

In Antioch, it appears that John would have faced competition in his fundraising efforts from Jews as well as from Christians within his own congregation who might be tempted either to support Jewish philanthropic efforts, or if they were wealthy, to spend their money on traditional forms of civic benefaction expected of the *curiales* and *decuriones*. As it is likely that a group of “Mes-salian” monks was present in Antioch when John was serving as a deacon and priest in that city, they would have diminished his patronage of the poor by diverting private contributions away from the church to themselves. Finally, if the Anomoeans were still meeting separately during John’s tenure as priest, they may have undermined support for his charitable programs as well. In Constantinople, it seems as if John’s main competitors were the Homoiousians and Isaac and his urban monks, the latter of whom probably took control of the

111 Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 177. See also Liebeschuetz, “Friends and Enemies of John Chrysostom,” 101–102.

112 *h. e.* 8.9 (GCS, n.s. 4, 361–362).

113 *v. Chrys.* 17 (SC 341, 348).

114 Socrates, *h. e.* 6.10 and 6.12 (GCS n.s. 1, 327–328 and 333–334); and Sozomen, *h. e.* 8.14 (GCS n.s. 4, 367–369).

115 *v. Chrys.* 17 (SC 341, 322–330).

city's charitable institutions when Theodosius I became emperor in 378, or certainly, soon after the Council of Constantinople in 381. As in Antioch, John likely faced additional competition in his solicitation for alms from certain groups of monks in the capital who were not self-sufficient and begged from individual members of his congregations. Finally, John sometimes even competed with Nicene clerics from other cities who visited the capitol from time to time.

As a deacon in Antioch, John might have been responsible for going door to door and collecting alms.<sup>116</sup> Later, as priest in the same city, he would have been expected to assist Bishop Flavian, who was frequently away on ecclesiastical business, in persuading the Christians in the Meletian churches to support the various institutions established on behalf of the sick and poor.<sup>117</sup> Finally, as bishop of Constantinople, John would have wanted to establish himself as the primary patron of the poor as a means of gaining authority over Isaac and his monks and of diminishing the influence of the Homoiousians. In each of these ecclesiastical roles, John and other Christians saw it as his duty to act as an advocate for the poor. This duty was closely bound to his authority. Soliciting and collecting alms for the poor was a way of both establishing and maintaining authority. When he was successful in this endeavor, his authority increased, but there was also always the danger that he would lose some of his influence if the people saw him as failing to meet this obligation.

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116 For the deacon's role in collecting and distributing alms, see *Const. App.* 8.47.41 (SC 336, 288); Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 36, 77; *Ordo Eccl. App.* 23 in J.W. Bickell, ed., *Geschichte des Kirchenrechts* (Frankfurt: Giessen, 1843), 107–132 at 125–126; and Sozomen, *h.e.* 4.20 (GCS, n.s. 4, 170).

117 For the duty of the priest/bishop in securing the donations, see John Chrysostom, *sac.* 3.12 (SC 272, 208); and Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, 36.

## Conclusion

Many of John's views concerning the value of almsgiving for the donor agreed with those of earlier Christians and were informed by Second Temple Jewish texts such as Dan. 4:27 (4:24 Theodotion); Sir. 3:30; Tob. 4:10–11; 12:8–9 that have been discussed by other scholars. Then, along with several other early and late antique Christians, he interpreted parts of the New Testament, such as Luke 11:41 and 16:9, to lend further support to the belief that almsgiving could cleanse sin and mediate for one before the judgment seat of God. Yet, John went beyond the tradition in claiming that almsgiving could cleanse *every* sin and counterbalance *all* sins. These claims enabled almsgiving to expiate even the capital sins of murder, adultery, and apostasy in the absence of a strict penitential discipline in Antioch and Constantinople.

Almsgiving, according to John, however, dealt with sin in more ways than just acting as a counterbalance or payment for past sins. John viewed sin primarily through the effects it had on the soul. Sin wounded. Sin stained. Sin burned, burdened, and aged.<sup>1</sup> Almsgiving was one element of repentance (μετάνοια) among many, such as confession, weeping, forgiving others, prayer, humility, teaching or converting others, and bearing suffering meekly, that dealt with sin and reversed its effects. Repentance healed, cleansed, ransomed, quenched, lifted the burden of sin, and renewed the soul. Almsgiving (ἐλεημοσύνη), however, was an *essential* component of repentance—even, as John claimed at times, the most necessary ingredient. It was more effective than many other forms of repentance because it benefitted others than just the one performing the action and was effective in counteracting every kind of sin.

Almsgiving also healed divisions within communities by minimizing disparities between the married and celibates and the rich and poor, thus, decreasing the occasions for sin. Almsgiving helped to abolish the distinction between

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1 See chapter two for a brief discussion of these metaphors. See the following passages for some examples of these metaphors. For sin as a wound, see *hom. in Jo.* 34.3 (PG 59, 197); for almsgiving as dirt, filth, or a stain, see *hom. in Heb.* 12.4 (PG 63, 102); and *hom. in Jo.* 73.2–3 (PG 59, 398); for sin as a fire, see *hom. in Gen.* 31.6 (PG 53, 292); for sin as a burden, see *hom. in Gen.* 30.2; and *hom. in Heb.* 9.4 (PG 63, 80); for sin as aging the soul, see *catech.* 6.22 (SC 50, 226); *hom. in Rom.* 20.2 (PG 60, 598); and *hom. in Heb.* 9.3 (PG 63, 79). For an example of how John mixes metaphors, see *hom. in Ac.* 25.3 (PG 60, 195–196), where he describes almsgiving as a medicine for sin as well as an agent that cleanses or quenches sin; and *hom. in Heb.* 9.3–4 (PG 63, 79–80), where he characterizes sin as an aging process, a burden, and a sickness.



“mine and yours,” which John described as a “cause of countless wars.”<sup>2</sup> Almsgiving also helped to inculcate concern for one’s neighbor—not simply for her physical comfort and well-being, but for her soul’s salvation and eternal happiness. One could give alms on behalf of a deceased family member to help wipe away her sins. Another might attract a non-believer to Christianity through an outpouring of generosity.

Almsgiving also provided other benefits. It increased the efficacy of one’s prayers, made people merciful like God, stored up treasure or reward in heaven, achieved undying reputation on earth, delivered from both a temporal and an eternal death, and decreased the suffering of the dead who were not in heaven. Almsgiving conferred many benefits, especially on the donor, but also on the poor, the wider Christian community, and even on society as a whole.

It should go without saying that like his Eastern contemporary, Basil of Caesarea, John exhibited a genuine concern for the poor.<sup>3</sup> Yet, while alms and the institutions established by them did indeed relieve the suffering of the needy, they also helped to solidify their founder’s reputation as a patron of the poor. This, in turn, helped John to win popular support in his battle against other Christian groups in both Antioch and Constantinople, against the Jews in Antioch, against Isaac and his monks in Constantinople, and against polytheistic Greeks who continued to exalt the traditional virtues of patriotism and loyalty to one’s city through civic benefaction. Almsgiving, therefore, was truly an all-purpose remedy. It provided solutions to a number of problems, both at the individual and at the communal level.

Although John’s claims regarding almsgiving’s efficacy are more far-sweeping than those of his predecessors and contemporaries, his ideas regarding almsgiving are also a part of the wider discourse on repentance in the late fourth and early fifth century; therefore, the findings of this study have implications not only for our understanding of John’s theology, but also for our comprehension of the process of Christianization in late antiquity. The main goal of sincere Christian pastors, then and now, is to help the members of their churches grow in virtue. During John’s time, almsgiving was seen as a tool for accomplishing this end. It was not simply that almsgiving atoned for prior sins, but that almsgiving helped to detach one from worldly possessions and to grow

<sup>2</sup> *hom. in Mt.* 72.3–4 (PG 58, 671).

<sup>3</sup> For example, like Basil, John founded a center for the care of lepers, just outside Constantinople. Unfortunately, John was unable to complete the project before his death in exile. See Ps-Martyrius, *pan.* 63 (Martin Wallraff, ed. *Oratio Funebris in Laudem Sancti Iohannis Chrysostomi, epitaffio attribuito a Martirio di Antiochia*. Quaderni della Rivista di Bizantinistica 12 [Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi Sull’alto Medioevo, 2007], 119).

in love for one's neighbor. This understanding of the motivations behind the discourse on almsgiving helps to correct some of the earlier scholarly emphasis on almsgiving as simply remitting the punishment due to sin.

Although not dealing with this topic in-depth, chapter three also adds to our understanding of late antique views of deification. It has generally been assumed that because Antiochene and Western Christians did not employ the technical language of deification, they rejected the doctrine. John, however, maintains that almsgiving "makes one like God." According to the categories established by Norman Russell, this is one type of deification in which one becomes like God through imitating God's attributes. Deification, therefore, is not strictly an Alexandrian or Cappadocian ideal. Although John used less specific terminology in his discussion of deification, he nevertheless taught the concept.

As expounded in chapter four, almsgiving led to moral transformation so much so that John even maintained it could atone for serious sins such as murder, adultery, and apostasy. The fact that John stands out from his contemporaries in his claims that almsgiving can cleanse every sin and counterbalance all sin shows that bishops in different regions throughout the empire did not deal with penitents in the exact same way. It appears that in the latter half of the fourth century, penance in Antioch and Constantinople looked somewhat different than it did in Rome, North Africa, and Cappadocia. For example, while John did seek to prevent those who were unrepentant from partaking of the Eucharist in Antioch, it appears that formal ecclesiastical penance was less public in John's congregations than in Rome or Cappadocia.

John's comments on almsgiving also help add to the overall picture in late antiquity of who gave alms and to whom, how they gave, when they gave, where they gave, and how much they gave. Giving practices varied according to region, to the local congregation, and even according to the individual. John encouraged all his parishioners to give, not only those who were the wealthiest. Although his wealthier donors may have contributed houses and land and large sums of money or like Olympias, funded his various philanthropic projects and provided for his daily needs, those of more modest means may have saved up their money bit by bit and brought it to church once it reached a substantial amount. Others may have given to beggars on the street or to those who knocked on their doors. While the giving practices in John's congregations in Antioch and Constantinople do not appear that different from those in other places, John's discourse on almsgiving is notable for his emphasis on direct giving and his expectation that everyone has something to contribute. While his predecessors and contemporaries sought to raise the status of the poor by stressing their role as intercessors between the donors and God, John discussed

other ways the poor might participate in this gift exchange. They could perform one of the acts of service mentioned in Matt. 25:31–46, offer encouraging words, lead a wayward sister or brother back to the church, or simply bear their poverty as Lazarus did, without complaining or lashing out at those able but unwilling to relieve their suffering.

But what are the ramifications of these findings for the future of Christian studies in antiquity as well as for Chrysostomic studies? What questions does this study raise which require further research? I will first suggest one avenue of inquiry this book has opened within early and late antique Christian studies and conclude with two possible questions to be pursued with specific regard to John Chrysostom.

As I emphasized in chapters two and four, John stood out among his eastern contemporaries in stressing almsgiving's ability to eradicate sin. This doctrine was much more prevalent in the West, particularly in the teachings of Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine. John's exegesis of Acts 9:36–10:49, in which he explained that Tabitha's and Cornelius' almsgiving delivered them respectively from a temporal and spiritual death, was very similar to Cyprian's explanation of this passage, suggesting that John may have read Cyprian and adopted the latter's interpretation as his own. One of John's ancient biographers, Ps. Martyrius, informs us that John was fluent in Latin, and J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz considers it likely that John had read and perhaps borrowed from some of Ambrose's homilies in composing his *Antequam iret in exilium*, the sermon he is thought to have delivered between his condemnation at the Synod of the Oak and subsequent exile.<sup>4</sup> This suggests we have a case in which an eastern Christian was strongly influenced by his western contemporaries. This is an interesting anomaly if, as most recent scholarship has argued, the influence moved from East to West in the early and late antique periods of Christianity. At the very least, more research is needed on the possible influence of Cyprian and Ambrose on John, if not on the influence of western Christians on their eastern counterparts, in general.

An important question for Chrysostom scholars is exactly how John viewed almsgiving as reversing the effects of sin. This question was only partially answered in chapter two. A more detailed investigation into the relation between John's view of almsgiving, his hamartiology, and soteriology is warranted. In light of the work of Mayer, Bae, Salem, and Papageorgiou, who discuss how John viewed sin as a true sickness of the soul or type of insanity, one might

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4 See Ps-Martyrius, *pan.* 50 in Wallraff, ed., 102; and Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose and John Chrysostom: Clerics between Desert and Empire*, 242–243 and 262–263.

explore John's view of sin more broadly across his corpus to determine if he always spoke of sin as a literal sickness or sometimes simply used sickness (or one of its synonyms) as an analogy for sin. Also, one might investigate how other forms of repentance, such as confessing one's sins, forgiving others, converting others, and bearing suffering meekly, countered sin and its effects in John's mind.

Another related question raised in chapter three is how almsgiving makes one like God. While I demonstrated that John taught that almsgiving made one merciful like God and that it helped to eliminate the vices of anger, pride, and greed, I did not elaborate on how he thought almsgiving accomplished these feats. Although Pak Wah-Lai and Maria Verhoeff have argued that John's soteriology contained the concept of deification, neither of them have addressed in detail the role almsgiving played in this process. Lai does not mention almsgiving at all in regard to John's concept of deification, and Verhoeff only allots one sentence to the idea in her dissertation. The significance of John's view of almsgiving for both deification and virtue formation, therefore, merits further analysis.

While John's corpus contains a rich reservoir of information both on the views and practice of almsgiving in late antique Christianity, his ideas did not develop in a vacuum. For this reason, other possible influences on his thought and discourse should continue to be explored. Further inquiry into the social factors that shaped his opinions on this subject will undoubtedly yield new data that will also help us better understand late antique eastern society as a whole. Despite the several recent studies on almsgiving, poverty, and repentance in John's thought, his corpus is still far from being depleted in these areas, and there is still much to be unearthed. With such an influential figure as John and such timeless topics as wealth, poverty, sin, repentance, and virtue, scholars should be able to mine the riches of his works for centuries.



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This book seeks to add to common representations in the scholarship on almsgiving in late antiquity concerning the remission of post-baptismal sin, efforts to reform society, and competition between monks and bishops. It demonstrates that John Chrysostom conceptualized almsgiving as not only expiating the sins of the rich, relieving the suffering of the poor, or securing power for its promoters, but also expiating the sins of the poor, unifying the members of his congregation, and making humans like God. Although it could indeed save one from eternal death and physical hunger, it was salvific and transformative on other levels as well.

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